

Coding Tip: Documenting Reasons for Non-Visualization During OB Ultrasound Exams

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Introduction:

Accurate documentation of reasons for non-visualization of components during an OB ultrasound exam is essential for compliance with AMA CPT ultrasound guidelines and AIUM. To report a complete examination, the report must document all components of the exam, including the stated results of the evaluation of each element or the reason for non-visualization. This documentation serves to demonstrate that all required elements of the study were attempted and to support the completeness of the examination.

The AIUM Practice Parameter for Documentation of an Ultrasound Examination (2019) states *“the concluding statements or summary of the report should include these components...an accounting of failure to include standard views or other necessary components (as listed in the appropriate practice parameter).”*

Case Scenario 1: Incomplete Documentation

Example Report:

Anatomy			
Cranium:	Appears normal	Aortic Arch:	Appears normal
Cavum:	Appears normal	Ductal Arch:	Appears normal
Ventricles:	Appears normal	Diaphragm:	Appears normal
Choroid Plexus:	Appears normal	Stomach:	Appears normal
Cerebellum:	Appears normal	Abdomen:	Appears normal
Posterior Fossa:	Appears normal	Abdominal Wall:	Appears normal
Face:	Appears normal	Cord Vessels:	Appears normal, 3 vessels
Lips:	Appears normal	Kidneys:	Appears normal
Palate:	Appears normal	Bladder:	Appears normal
Heart:	Appears normal	Spine:	Not visualized
RVOT:	Not visualized	Upper Extremities:	Appears normal
LVOT:	Not visualized	Lower Extremities:	Appears normal

Impression
Singleton intrauterine pregnancy with measurements consistent with stated gestational age. Fetal anatomic survey was performed and visualized anatomy appears normal. The following structures were not visualized: RVOT, LVOT, spine.

Recommendations
Consider follow up ultrasound exam in 1-2 weeks to attempt to obtain these limited views to complete the anatomic evaluation.

Issue: The report does not provide reasons for non-visualization for the RVOT, LVOT and spine.



Case Scenario 2: Complete Documentation

Example Report:

a)

Anatomy			
Cranium:	Appears normal	Aortic Arch:	Appears normal
Cavum:	Appears normal	Ductal Arch:	Appears normal
Ventricles:	Appears normal	Diaphragm:	Appears normal
Choroid Plexus:	Appears normal	Stomach:	Appears normal
Cerebellum:	Appears normal	Abdomen:	Appears normal
Posterior Fossa:	Appears normal	Abdominal Wall:	Appears normal
Face:	Appears normal	Cord Vessels:	Appears normal, 3 vessels
Lips:	Appears normal	Kidneys:	Appears normal
Palate:	Appears normal	Bladder:	Appears normal
Heart:	Appears normal	Spine:	Not visualized due to fetal position
RVOT:	Not visualized due to fetal position	Upper Extremities:	Appears normal
LVOT:	Not visualized due to fetal position	Lower Extremities:	Appears normal

Impression

Singleton intrauterine pregnancy with measurements consistent with stated gestational age. Fetal anatomic survey was performed and visualized anatomy appears normal. However, certain structures were not visualized as noted above.

Recommendations

Consider follow up ultrasound exam in 1-2 weeks to attempt to obtain these limited views to complete the anatomic evaluation.

b)

Anatomy			
Cranium:	Appears normal	Aortic Arch:	Appears normal
Cavum:	Appears normal	Ductal Arch:	Appears normal
Ventricles:	Appears normal	Diaphragm:	Appears normal
Choroid Plexus:	Appears normal	Stomach:	Appears normal
Cerebellum:	Appears normal	Abdomen:	Appears normal
Posterior Fossa:	Appears normal	Abdominal Wall:	Appears normal
Face:	Appears normal	Cord Vessels:	Appears normal, 3 vessels
Lips:	Appears normal	Kidneys:	Appears normal
Palate:	Appears normal	Bladder:	Appears normal
Heart:	Appears normal	Spine:	Not visualized
RVOT:	Not visualized	Upper Extremities:	Appears normal
LVOT:	Not visualized	Lower Extremities:	Appears normal

Impression

Singleton intrauterine pregnancy with measurements consistent with stated gestational age. Fetal anatomic survey was performed and visualized anatomy appears normal. RVOT, LVOT and spine were not visualized due to maternal acoustic properties and unfavorable fetal position.

Recommendations

Consider follow up ultrasound exam in 1-2 weeks to attempt to obtain these limited views to complete the anatomic evaluation.

Solution: The report provides specific reasons for non-visualization for the RVOT, LVOT and spine.

Conclusion:

Documentation of non-visualization provides clear communication regarding the exam's findings and limitations, the rationale for a follow-up ultrasound, ensures the billability of the exam, and helps avoid potential payment denials from payers who scrutinize these details.

*Sample Suggested Report Template Statement:

“Components not visualized: [insert components] was not visualized due to [Reason]”

Reason (can include more than one):

- Unfavorable fetal position
- Maternal habitus
- Maternal acoustic properties
- Shadowing from fetal limbs
- Early gestational age
- Advanced gestational age
- Other (must specify)

*List not meant to be comprehensive.

Members should submit any coding questions to the SMFM Coding Committee “Ask a Coding Question” website (smfm.org/ask-a-coding-question). Additional information and resources are also available on our coding website (smfm.org/coding). Thank you very much.

