

**LCD Information**

Echocardiography may be used to assess diastolic function in patients with difficult to control hypertension, for the guidance of treatment decisions. Echocardiography is not indicated for patients with controlled hypertension.

**22. Pulmonary Heart Disease**

Echocardiography is useful in the evaluation and monitoring of right sided heart failure due to pulmonary hypertension or other types of pulmonary disease in which the right ventricle must pump against high pressures in the lungs. Frequency of periodic reassessment will be dictated by clinical status and interventions.

**23. Transesophageal Cardiac Output Monitoring** - Effective 5/17/2007, this service can be covered, when medically required, for ventilated ICU patients and inpatient/outpatient surgical patients. Change Request 5608 instructs providers to use unlisted CPT code 76999-26 for this service.

**Limitations**

1. Echocardiographic studies are not payable by Medicare when they are not reasonable and necessary to obtain clinically significant diagnostic or monitoring information. The contractor will utilize recognized resources such as the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association (ACC/AHA) Practice Guidelines in such determinations.
2. The utilization of contrast should not be routine protocol in the laboratory/office setting. Patients requiring contrast should be carefully selected and the decision to use contrast should be made following a pre-contrast study and an assessment of echocardiographic data.
3. Studies without, and then with, contrast will be considered a single study, whether performed on the same or sequential days.
4. Contrast echocardiography is not covered when used to evaluate perfusion.

**Training Requirements**

The following training requirements do not apply to hospital in-patient or out-patient echocardiography services.

The contractor itself does not credential providers. Medicare does expect a satisfactory level of competence from providers who submit claims for services rendered. Medicare services are only payable when performed by appropriate staff in an appropriate setting (explicitly stated in the Medicare Program Integrity Manual, Pub. 100-08, Chapter 13). Substandard studies are associated with unnecessary repetition of studies and overutilization of services. Substandard studies can directly endanger the patient if medical conditions are not able to be diagnosed because of a poorly or improperly conducted study, or, medical conditions are not recognized because the level of expertise of the interpreter does not meet accepted professional standards. The most commonly cited professional standard is that of the ACC/AHA (American College of Cardiology, American Hospital Association; For transthoracic echo, Level 1 experience is defined as "not sufficient to perform or interpret echocardiograms independently," Level 2 experience is a level appropriate for independent practice of echocardiograms, and Level 3 experience is appropriate for a center director.

The acceptable levels of competence are:

**For the technical portion**, an acceptable level of competence is fulfilled when the image acquisition is obtained under any one of the following conditions:

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1. The service is performed personally by a physician with full training in cardiac structure and function, the acquisition of echocardiography images, echocardiographic equipment functions, and trouble shooting, e.g. similar to Level 2 experience of the ACC/AHA; or
2. The service is performed by a technician who is credentialed as either a Registered Diagnostic Cardiac Sonographer (RDCS) through the American Registry of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers or as a Registered Cardiac Sonographer (RCS) through the Cardiovascular Credentialing International; or
3. The service is performed at a laboratory (e.g. office, IDTF), credentialed by the Intersocietal Commission for the Accreditation of Echocardiography Laboratories (ICAEL).

Note that the national supervision level is 1 (general supervision) for TTE and 3 (personal supervision) for the technical component of TEE. You may find the current year CMS RVU/fee schedule database (e.g. PRRVU06.xls, column Z) at [www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov).

**For the professional portion (interpretation)**, an acceptable level of competence is fulfilled when the interpretation is performed by a physician meeting one of the following requirements:

**For Transthoracic Echocardiography (TTE) and/or Transesophageal Echocardiography (TEE):**

1. The physician is ABIM board certified or board eligible in Cardiovascular Diseases; OR
2. The physician provides the interpretation in conjunction with a study that was performed at a laboratory that is accredited by the Intersocietal Commission for the Accreditation of Echocardiography Laboratories (ICAEL) and that is subject to such laboratory's quality assurance policies and procedures (the ICAEL website is [www.intersocietal.org/icael/apply/standards.htm](http://www.intersocietal.org/icael/apply/standards.htm)).

**For Transthoracic Echocardiography (TTE):**

1. The physician has Level II training in transthoracic echocardiography, as defined by the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association/American College of Physicians Task Force on Clinical Competence in Echocardiography. Level II training is the basic level for independent practice. OR
2. The equivalent of Level II training of the ACC/AHA. This A/B MAC requires that this training must be obtained by working under a mentor who is fully qualified to teach and supervise, e.g. Level III training of the ACC/AHA. ("Training and competence" are not demonstrated by prior reimbursement for multiple procedures by Medicare prior to the implementation of this LCD). OR
3. The physician has staff privileges to interpret hospital transthoracic echocardiograms at a hospital that participates in the Medicare program. This A/B MAC further requires that the physician must be authorized by the hospital to interpret any and all TTE examinations and not just those obtained by him or herself. The hospital Echocardiography Laboratory must be accredited by ICAEL.