

Medical-Legal Charting

A Blueprint for Audit-Proof Acupuncture Documentation & Claim
Submissions



The Defensible SOAP Note

Transitioning from wellness narratives to data-driven, quantifiable clinical proof.



Subjective & Objective Data

Subjective (The Narrative)

Focus strictly on the mechanism of injury and measurable functional deficits.

- **Mechanism of Injury (MOI):** Detail the exact cause (e.g., "Rear-ended at 40mph, struck right shoulder on door").
- **Activities of Daily Living (ADLs):** Document specific, work-or-survival related limitations (e.g., "Cannot sit at desk for >20 mins").
- **Pain Scale:** Quantify using a 0-10 scale denoting location, quality, and frequency.

Objective (The Proof)

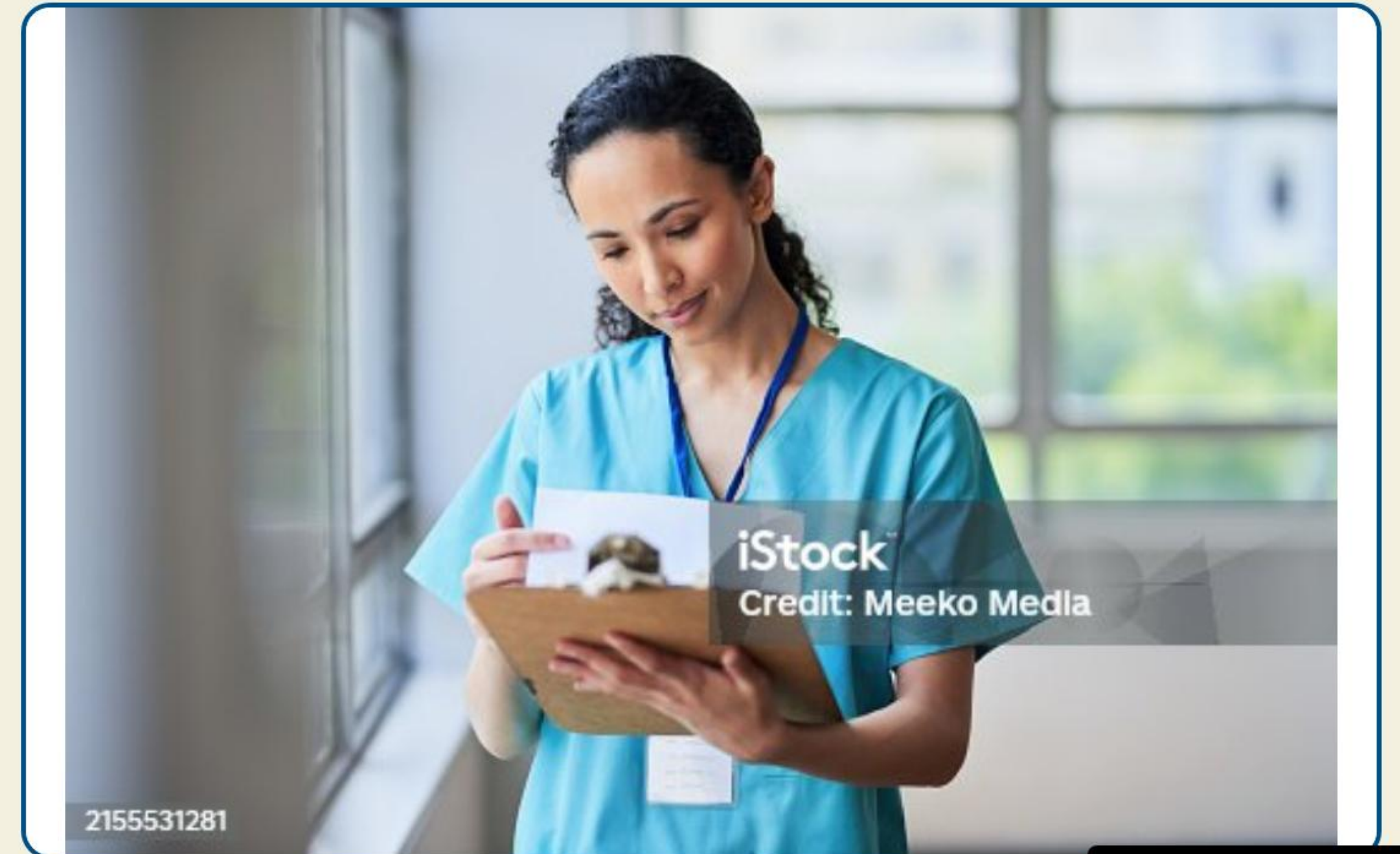
Document actionable data to justify billing and active management.

- **Outcome Measures:** Include validated scores every 2-4 weeks (e.g., Oswestry Low Back Pain Scale, NDI).
- **Range of Motion (ROM):** Document specific degrees of restriction compared to normal limits.
- **Orthopedic Testing:** List positive and negative findings relevant to the diagnosis.



Assessment & Plan

- **Comparative Data:** Explicitly state improvements or regressions since the last visit (e.g., "Lumbar flexion improved by 10° since initial eval").
- **Guideline Compliance:** Note adherence to Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) or Medical Treatment Utilization Schedule (MTUS).
- **Short-Term Goals (STGs):** Set functional milestones to be achieved within a 2–4 week timeframe.
- **Treatment Frequency:** Clearly state the authorized plan and current progress (e.g., "Visit 4 of 12; treating 2x/week").
- **Home Care:** Document prescribed stretches, heat/ice protocols, or ergonomic advice to provide active care.



Time-Based Billing & The 8-Minute Rule

Acupuncture CPT codes require continuous personal contact or active management. You must document exact face-to-face times. *Note: CPT 97810 and 97813 cannot be billed on the same date.*

Billed Units	Face-to-Face Minutes	Example Charting Entry
1 Unit	8 – 22 minutes	"Start: 10:05. Stop: 10:20. Total face-to-face: 15 mins."
2 Units	23 – 37 minutes	"Start: 10:25. Stop: 10:40. Total face-to-face: 15 mins."
3 Units	38 – 52 minutes	Requires combining initial and subsequent codes properly.
4 Units	53 – 67 minutes	Subject to strict medical necessity reviews and guidelines



ICD-10 Suffixes & Strategic Coding

Injury claims require precise ICD-10 coding using the 7th character extension to indicate the exact phase of care. Missing suffixes will result in automatic clearinghouse rejections.



A (Initial)

Use during the active treatment phase while the patient is actively receiving care for the original injury.



D (Subsequent)

Use for routine care during the healing and recovery phase. Using 'A' when it should be 'D' triggers automatic denials.



S (Sequela)

Use for complications or secondary conditions arising directly as a result of the original injury.



Submissions & Approvals

- **Pre-Claim Scrubbing:** Ensure Evaluation & Management (E/M) codes billed on the same day as acupuncture treatment include Modifier 25.
- **Clean Formatting:** Export notes in a clean PDF format. The provider's signature, date, and NPI must be visible at the bottom of every page.
- **Re-authorization (LMNs):** Letters of Medical Necessity are required when care extends beyond initial guidelines.
- **LMN Requirements:** Must include the original injury date, quantifiable progress made, remaining ADL deficits preventing return to work, and the specific visit request.



sisted Coding



Questions?

Protect your practice and your patients with compliant documentation.

www.ngaom.org | support@ngaom.org



Image Sources



https://media.istockphoto.com/id/2155531281/photo/focused-nurse-reviewing-patient-records-on-clipboard-in-hospital.jpg?s=170667a&w=is&k=20&c=MNDw_VxP6bHYQMEnLQyeSQVILLdi2Q6CCzMJgVHQZco=

Source: www.istockphoto.com



<https://cdn.outrank.so/1abf8233-06e3-428a-a230-1c79aa4f844f/55c8d4ad-ad5c-4684-8b9c-ca1efa79fbe2/ai-in-medical-coding-ai-coding.jpg>

Source: www.simbie.ai