



Breakout Room Case Scenario: Identifying When to Use Z Codes

James is a 42-year-old client with a history of **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** who presents for a follow-up therapy session reporting increased anxiety, difficulty concentrating, irritability, and disrupted sleep over the past several weeks.

James reports feeling increasingly worried about his housing situation after receiving notice from his landlord that he is behind on rent and may face eviction if the outstanding balance is not resolved. He shared that he recently experienced a reduction in work hours and has struggled to keep up with monthly expenses. As a result, he has begun using credit cards to cover basic living costs and is concerned about accumulating debt.

James currently lives with his partner of three years. While his partner has been supportive, the increased financial strain has led to more frequent disagreements about household expenses and budgeting. James describes these conflicts as stressful but reports that the relationship remains stable overall.

In addition to financial concerns, James reports experiencing difficulties at work. He has recently received feedback from his supervisor regarding missed deadlines and decreased productivity. James attributes these challenges to persistent worry, difficulty concentrating, and feeling distracted by concerns about finances and housing. He worries that continued poor performance could negatively affect his job security.

James reports spending significant time thinking about "what will happen if we lose our apartment" and finds it difficult to relax or disengage from these thoughts. He identifies maintaining stable housing, improving work performance, and managing anxiety symptoms as primary goals for treatment.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the relevant

1. mental disorders...
2. psychosocial stressors...
3. treatment focus...
4. social determinant(s) affecting care...

Identify

1. Primary Diagnosis

- What is the most appropriate mental health diagnosis?



2. Relevant Z/V Codes

- Which psychosocial, environmental, relational, and occupational factors should be documented using Z Codes?

3. Rationale

- Why is each Z Code clinically relevant?
- How are these factors contributing to symptom severity, functioning, treatment engagement, or prognosis?

4. Treatment Planning

- What treatment goals and interventions would address both the anxiety symptoms and psychosocial stressors?
- How might documenting Z Codes strengthen medical necessity and person-centered documentation?

Feedback

Primary Diagnosis

F41.1 Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Potential Z Codes

Z59.819 Housing Instability

Z59.86 Financial Insecurity / Financial Hardship

Z56.9 Employment-Related Problem, Unspecified

Z63.0 Relationship Distress with Spouse or Intimate Partner *(if the relational stress is clinically relevant and addressed in treatment as of right now this isn't, however, should James come into the next few sessions noting this then this would be included.)*

Considerations:

The generalized anxiety disorder diagnosis captures James' symptoms of excessive worry, sleep disturbance, irritability, and concentration difficulties. The use of the identified Z Codes allow you to identify the contextual factors contributing to and maintaining those symptoms, including housing instability, financial hardship, and work-related difficulties. Together, they provide a more comprehensive diagnostic formulation, support medical necessity, and guide treatment planning focused on both symptom reduction and environmental stressors.

Some helpful recommendations may include referral to community resources; benefits assistance.