Duke Samson is the world’s greatest cerebrovascular surgeon and everything that I know about CPT coding I learned from him. Indirectly.

During my fellowship in Dr. Samson’s department I was surprised by the attention paid to the details of proper coding. Surgeries were reviewed weekly by our coders and surgeons, and Dr. Samson required everyone in the department to devote an entire day annually to reviewing the latest changes in CPT codes. Prior to this, through my entire residency, I had only a vague notion of what a CPT code was. But now the message was clear: this is important. However, after three years I realized that while I could code surgeries accurately I still did not understand evaluation and management (E/M) codes. I was determined to understand this arcane subject. My method of making simple (or at least understandable) a ridiculously complex set of algorithms is the subject of this book.

The entire book is supposed to be a shortcut to understanding, but here is the shortcut to the book: medical decision making. Medical decision making is the key to proper E/M coding. If you determine your medical decision making first, the history and physical will follow naturally. If you understand the medical decision making of an encounter, everything else will fit easily into place.

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