

Anatomy and Physiology Tip

The Pharynx and Larynx

In an effort to aid Health Information Management Coding Professionals with ICD-10 readiness, the following anatomy tip is provided with an educational intent.

The pharynx

Three Segments:

- a. The *nasopharynx* (epipharynx) extends from the base of the skull to the upper surface of the soft palate, ending at the uvula, which is the piece of tissue that hangs at the back of the throat. It provides a route for air to flow separately from the route that food takes during the first steps of the digestive process.
- b. The *oropharynx* (mesopharynx) is the oral part of the pharynx that extends from the uvula to the hyphoid bone. It includes the soft palate, tonsils, and base of the tongue. The oropharynx plays a very important role in speech and swallowing.
- c. The *laryngopharynx* (hypopharynx) or throat is the part of the pharynx that connects to the esophagus.

The larynx connects the pharynx to the trachea.

Two Structures:

- a. The *epiglottis*, which is located just superior to the larynx is a flap-like structure that covers the opening of the larynx during swallowing. It prevents food and liquid from entering the trachea and harming the lungs.
- b. *Vocal cords* or voice box, which is located at the top of the trachea. It is composed of ligaments that vibrate to produce sound as air passes over them. The more air passes over them, the louder the sound that is produced. Change in pitch occurs through the use of small muscles that pull on the vocal cords. The vocal cords, along with the slit between them are known as the glottis. If food somehow gets past the epiglottis, the glottis will close to make sure food does not enter the trachea.

References/Resources: 1. Okabe, Jerry M., et al. *Advanced Anatomy and Physiology for ICD-10-CM/PCS*. Salt Lake City, UT: Contexo Media, 2011. Print. Clayman, 2. Charles B. *The Human Body: an Illustrated Guide to Its Structure, Function, and Disorders*. London: Dorling Kindersley Pub., 1995. Print. This Anatomy and Physiology tip sheet was developed by the CHIA Coding and Data Quality Committee as an educational resource 2013. Copyright © California Health Information Association, 2013.