

## Medical Coverage Policy | Pulsed Radiofrequency for the Treatment of Chronic Pain



**EFFECTIVE DATE:** 02|19|2018  
**POLICY LAST UPDATED:** 01|21|2020

### OVERVIEW

Pulsed radiofrequency (RF) facet denervation is used to treat neck and back pain originating in facet joints with degenerative changes. Diagnosis of facet joint pain is confirmed by response to nerve blocks. The goal of facet denervation is long-term pain relief. However, the nerves regenerate and, therefore, repeat procedures may be required.

### MEDICAL CRITERIA

Not applicable

### PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Not applicable

### POLICY STATEMENT

#### BlueCHiP for Medicare

Pulsed radiofrequency denervation for the treatment of chronic spinal/back pain is not covered as the evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

#### Commercial Products

Pulsed radiofrequency denervation for the treatment of chronic spinal/back pain is considered not medically necessary as the evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

### COVERAGE

Benefits may vary between groups and contracts. Please refer to the appropriate Benefit Booklet, Evidence of Coverage or Subscriber Agreement for applicable not medically necessary/not covered benefits/coverage.

### BACKGROUND

Pulsed RF consists of short bursts of electrical current of high voltage in the RF range but without heating the tissue enough to cause coagulation. RF is suggested as a possibly safer alternative to thermal RF facet denervation. Temperatures do not exceed 42°C at the probe tip versus temperatures in the 60°C range reached in thermal RF denervation, and tissues may cool between pulses. It is postulated that transmission across small unmyelinated nerve fibers is disrupted but not permanently damaged, while large myelinated fibers are not affected.

Pulsed radiofrequency does not appear to be as effective as conventional radiofrequency denervation, and there is insufficient evidence to evaluate the efficacy of other methods of denervation (eg, alcohol, laser, cryodenervation) for facet joint pain. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes. Therefore, these techniques are considered not medically necessary.

### CODING

#### BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial Products

At this time there are no specific CPT codes to describe pulsed radiofrequency. Providers should file using the unlisted code below:

**64999** Unlisted procedure, nervous system

## RELATED POLICIES

Lysis of Epidural Adhesions  
Navigated Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation  
Nerve Graft with Radical Prostatectomy  
Occipital Nerve Stimulation – Insertion  
Percutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation and Percutaneous Neuromodulation Therapy  
Peripheral Subcutaneous Field Stimulation  
Sphenopalatine Ganglion Block for Headache

## PUBLISHED

Provider Update, March 2020  
Provider Update, April 2019  
Provider Update, March 2018  
Provider Update, March 2017  
Provider Update, March 2016

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