



EFFECTIVE DATE: 10|06|2009

POLICY LAST UPDATED: 09|07|2022

OVERVIEW

Radioembolization (RE), also referred to as selective internal radiotherapy, delivers small beads (microspheres) impregnated with yttrium 90 intra-arterially via the hepatic artery. Radioembolization has been proposed as a therapy for multiple types of primary and metastatic liver tumors.

MEDICAL CRITERIA

Radioembolization may be considered medically necessary as a treatment for any of the following:

- Primary hepatocellular carcinoma that is unresectable and limited to the liver.
- In primary hepatocellular carcinoma as a bridge to liver transplantation.
- Hepatic metastases from neuroendocrine tumors (carcinoid and noncarcinoid) with diffuse and symptomatic disease when systemic therapy has failed to control symptoms.
- Unresectable hepatic metastases from colorectal carcinoma, melanoma (ocular or cutaneous), or breast cancer that are both progressive and diffuse, in patients with liver-dominant disease who are refractory to chemotherapy or are not candidates for chemotherapy.
- Primary intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma in patients with unresectable tumors.

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Prior authorization is required for Medicare Advantage Plan members and recommended for Commercial products.

POLICY STATEMENT

Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products

Radioembolization is considered medically necessary when the medical criteria have been met.

Radioembolization is considered not covered for Medicare Advantage Plans and not medically necessary for Commercial products for all other indications.

COVERAGE

Benefits may vary between groups and contracts. Please refer to the appropriate Benefit Booklet, Evidence of Coverage, or Subscriber Agreement for the applicable radiology benefits.

BACKGROUND

Treatments for Hepatic and Neuroendocrine Tumors

The use of external beam radiotherapy and the application of more advanced radiotherapy approaches (e.g., intensity-modulated radiotherapy) may be of limited use in patients with diffuse, multiple lesions due to the low tolerance of the normal liver to radiation compared with the higher doses of radiation needed to kill the tumor.

Various nonsurgical ablative techniques have been investigated that seek to cure or palliate unresectable hepatic tumors by improving locoregional control. These techniques rely on extreme temperature changes (cryosurgery or radiofrequency ablation, particle and wave physics (microwave or laser ablation), or arterial embolization therapy including chemoembolization, bland embolization, or radioembolization.

Radioembolization

Radioembolization (referred to as selective internal radiotherapy in older literature) delivers small beads (microspheres) impregnated with yttrium 90 (Y90) intra-arterially via the hepatic artery. The microspheres, which become permanently embedded, are delivered to tumors preferentially because the hepatic circulation is uniquely organized, whereby tumors greater than 0.5 cm rely on the hepatic artery for blood supply while the normal liver is primarily perfused via the portal vein. Y90 is a pure beta-emitter with a relatively limited effective range and short half-life that helps focus the radiation and minimize its spread. Candidates for radioembolization are initially examined by hepatic angiogram to identify and map the hepatic arterial system. At that time, a mixture of technetium 99-labeled albumin particles is delivered via the hepatic artery to simulate microspheres. Single photon emission computed tomography imaging is used to detect possible shunting of the albumin particles into the gastrointestinal or pulmonary vasculature.

Currently, 2 commercial forms of Y90 microspheres are available: a glass sphere (TheraSphere) and a resin sphere (SIR-Spheres). Noncommercial forms are mostly used outside the U.S. While the commercial products use the same radioisotope (Y90) and have the same target dose (100 gray), they differ in microsphere size profile, base material (ie, resin vs glass), and size of commercially available doses. The physical characteristics of the active and inactive ingredients affect the flow of microspheres during injection, their retention at the tumor site, spread outside the therapeutic target region, and dosimetry calculations. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted premarket approval of SIR-Spheres for use in combination with 5-fluoridine chemotherapy by hepatic arterial infusion to treat unresectable hepatic metastases from colorectal cancer. In contrast, TheraSphere's glass sphere was approved under a humanitarian device exemption for use as monotherapy to treat unresectable hepatocellular carcinoma. In 2007, this humanitarian device exemption was expanded to include patients with hepatocellular carcinoma who have partial or branch portal vein thrombosis. For these reasons, results obtained with a product do not necessarily apply to another commercial (or non-commercial) products.

Regulatory Status

Currently, 2 forms of yttrium-90 microspheres have been approved by FDA.

In 1999, TheraSphere® (Boston Scientific; previously manufactured by Nordion, under license by BTG International), a glass sphere system, was approved by the FDA through the humanitarian drug exemption process for radiotherapy or as a neoadjuvant treatment to surgery or transplantation in patients with unresectable hepatocellular carcinoma who can have placement of appropriately positioned hepatic arterial catheters.

On March 17, 2021, TheraSphere received approval through the premarket approval process for use as selective internal radiation therapy (SIRT) for local tumor control of solitary tumors (1-8 cm in diameter), in patients with unresectable hepatocellular carcinoma, Child-Pugh Score A cirrhosis, well-compensated liver function, no macrovascular invasion, and good performance status.

In 2002, SIR-Spheres® (ex Medical), a resin sphere system, was approved by the FDA through the premarket approval process for the treatment of inoperable colorectal cancer metastatic to the liver.

Clinical input obtained in 2010, 2011, and 2015 has supported the use of RE for primary hepatocellular carcinoma, intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma, hepatic metastases from neuroendocrine tumors, chemorefractory colorectal carcinoma, chemorefractory breast cancer, and chemorefractory melanoma. The evidence is sufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

CODING

Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products

There are no specific CPT codes describing radioembolization therapy. Providers should file using the unlisted CPT code:

77399

RELATED POLICIES

Not applicable

PUBLISHED

Provider Update, November 2022

Provider Update, November 2021

Provider Update, November 2020

Provider Update, October 2019

Provider Update, November 2018

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