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OVERVIEW

Intravenous (IV) infusion of lidocaine or ketamine has been investigated for the treatment of migraine and chronic daily headache, fibromyalgia, and chronic neuropathic pain. Chronic neuropathic pain disorders include phantom limb pain, postherpetic neuralgia, complex regional pain syndromes (CRPSs), diabetic neuropathy, and pain related to stroke or spinal cord injuries. For this application, 1 or more courses of IV infusion would be administered over a period of several hours or several days.

MEDICAL CRITERIA

Not applicable

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Not applicable

POLICY STATEMENT

BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial Products

Intravenous infusion of anesthetics (e.g., ketamine or lidocaine) for the management of chronic pain including, but not limited to chronic neuropathic pain, chronic daily headache, and fibromyalgia, is considered not medically necessary as there is insufficient peer-reviewed scientific literature that demonstrates that the service is effective.

COVERAGE

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

BACKGROUND

Intravenous (IV) infusion of lidocaine or ketamine has been investigated for the treatment of migraine and chronic daily headache, fibromyalgia, and chronic neuropathic pain. Chronic neuropathic pain disorders include phantom limb pain, postherpetic neuralgia, complex regional pain syndromes (CRPSs), diabetic neuropathy, and pain related to stroke or spinal cord injuries. For this application, 1 or more courses of IV infusion would be administered over a period of several hours or several days.

Neuropathic pain is often disproportionate to the extent of the primary triggering injury and may consist of thermal or mechanical allodynia, dysesthesia, and/or hyperalgesia. Allodynia is pain that occurs from a stimulus that normally does not elicit a painful response (e.g., light touch, warmth). Dysesthesia is a constant or ongoing unpleasant or electrical sensation of pain. Hyperalgesia is an exaggerated response to normally painful stimuli. In the latter, symptoms may continue for a period of time that is longer (e.g., 6 months or more) than clinically expected after an illness or injury. It is proposed that chronic neuropathic pain results from peripheral afferent sensitization, neurogenic inflammation, and sympathetic afferent coupling, along with sensitization and functional reorganization of the somatosensory, motor, and autonomic circuits in the central nervous system. Therefore, treatments focus on reducing activity and desensitizing pain pathways thought to be mediated through N-methyl-d-aspartate (NMDA) receptors in the peripheral and central nervous system. Sympathetic ganglion blocks with lidocaine have been used for a number of years to treat sympathetically maintained chronic pain conditions, such as complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS,

previously known as reflex sympathetic dystrophy). Test infusion of an anesthetic has also been used in treatment planning to assess patient responsiveness to determine whether medications, such as oral mexiletine or oral ketamine, may be effective. A course of IV lidocaine or ketamine, usually at subanesthetic doses, has also been examined. This approach for treating chronic neuropathic pain differs from continuous subcutaneous or IV infusion of anesthetics for the management of chronic pain conditions, such as terminal cancer pain, which are not discussed in this policy.

Chronic daily headache is defined as a headache disorder that occurs more than 15 days a month for at least 3 months. Chronic daily headache includes chronic migraine, new daily persistent headache, hemicranias continua, and chronic tension-type headache.

Courses of IV anesthetic agents may be given in the inpatient or outpatient setting as part of a pain management program, with the infusion of a subanesthetic dose preceded by a bolus infusion to achieve desired blood levels sooner. Lidocaine, which prevents neural depolarization through effects on voltage-dependent sodium channels, is also used systemically for the treatment of arrhythmias. Adverse effects for lidocaine are common, can be mild to moderate, and include general fatigue, somnolence, dizziness, headache, periorbital and extremity numbness and tingling, nausea, vomiting, tremors, and changes in blood pressure and pulse. Severe adverse effects may include arrhythmias, seizures, loss of consciousness, confusion, or even death. Lidocaine should only be given intravenously to patients with normal conduction on electrocardiography and normal serum electrolyte concentrations to minimize the risk of cardiac arrhythmias.

Ketamine is an antagonist of the NMDA receptor and a dissociative anesthetic. It is the sole anesthetic agent approved for diagnostic and surgical procedures that do not require skeletal muscle relaxation. Respiratory depression may occur with overdosage or too rapid a rate of administration of ketamine; it should be used by or under the direction of physicians experienced in administering general anesthetics. Ketamine is a schedule III controlled substance. Psychological manifestations vary in severity from pleasant dream-like states to hallucinations and delirium and can be accompanied by confusion, excitement, aggression, or irrational behavior. The occurrence of AEs with IV anesthetics may be reduced by the careful titration of subanesthetic doses. However, the potential benefits of pain control must be carefully weighed against the potential for serious, harmful AEs.

Regulatory Status

IV lidocaine is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for systemic use in the acute treatment of arrhythmias and locally as an anesthetic. IV lidocaine for the treatment of chronic pain is an off-label use. Ketamine hydrochloride injection is FDA-indicated for diagnostic and surgical procedures that do not require skeletal muscle relaxation, for the induction of anesthesia before the administration of other general anesthetic agents, and to supplement low-potency agents, such as nitrous oxide. IV ketamine for the treatment of chronic pain is an off-label use.

Intractable pain presents a great challenge to patients and their healthcare providers. Recent evidence, primarily from outside of the United States, suggests that intravenous (IV) courses of ketamine may provide at least temporary relief to some chronic pain patients. However, the intense treatment protocols, severity of adverse effects, and limited durability raises questions about the overall health benefit of this procedure. Additional clinical trials are needed to evaluate the long-term safety of repeat courses of IV anesthetics. Therefore, this treatment is considered not medically necessary due to lack of medical peer-reviewed literature that supports its efficacy.

CODING

BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial Products

There is no specific CPT code for this service; Claims should be filed using an unlisted CPT code.

RELATED POLICIES

None

PUBLISHED

Provider Update, October, 2015

Provider Update, March 2013

Provider Update, July 2011

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