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

EFFECTIVE DATE: 02|19|2008
POLICY LAST UPDATED: 04|21|2015

OVERVIEW
Pulsed radiofrequency is a method of denervation to treat spinal pain, but it does not destroy or damage nerves.

MEDICAL CRITERIA
Not applicable

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION
Not applicable

POLICY STATEMENT
BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial Products
Pulsed radiofrequency treatment for the treatment of chronic spinal/back pain is considered not medically necessary because there is insufficient evidence in the published medical literature to demonstrate its safety and efficacy.

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

BACKGROUND
Pulsed radiofrequency (RF) is a nondestructive alternative to facet joint denervation for the treatment of neck or back pain. 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. It 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 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 non-pulsed radiofrequency denervation, and there is insufficient evidence to evaluate the efficacy of other methods of denervation for facet joint pain. 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

RELATED POLICIES
Not applicable

PUBLISHED
Provider Update, July 2015

Provider Update, June 2014
Provider Update, June 2013
Provider Update, May 2012
Provider Update, May 2011
Provider Update, May 2010
Provider Update, July 2009

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