

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



EFFECTIVE DATE: 02/19/2008
POLICY LAST UPDATED: 04/01/2014

OVERVIEW

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

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Not applicable.

POLICY STATEMENT

BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial

Pulsed radiofrequency treatment for pain is considered not medically necessary because there is insufficient evidence in the published medical literature to demonstrate its safety and efficacy in the treatment of spinal pain.

MEDICAL CRITERIA

Not applicable.

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°s 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.

COVERAGE

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

CODING

BlueCHiP for Medicare and Commercial

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	Jun 2014
Provider Update	Jun 2013
Provider Update	May 2012
Provider Update	May 2011
Provider Update	May 2010
Provider Update	Jul 2009
Provider Update	Jun 2008

REFERENCES

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