

**Medical and Behavioral Health Policy**

Section: Medicine

Policy Number: II-140

Effective Date: 03/26/2014

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota medical policies do not imply that members should not receive specific services based on the recommendation of their provider. These policies govern coverage and not clinical practice. Providers are responsible for medical advice and treatment of patients. Members with specific health care needs should consult an appropriate health care professional.

**OCCIPITAL NERVE STIMULATION**

**Description:** Occipital nerve stimulation (ONS) delivers a small electrical charge to the occipital nerve in an attempt to prevent migraines and other headaches in patients who have not responded to medications. The device consists of a subcutaneously implanted pulse generator (in the chest wall or abdomen) attached to extension leads that are tunneled to join electrodes placed across one or both occipital nerves at the base of the skull. Continuous or intermittent stimulation may be used.

Although implanted peripheral nerve stimulators have been used for treatment of refractory pain for a number of years, their use in the management of craniofacial pain is a more recent application of the technology.

Migraine is the most common type of vascular headache. Migraine headaches are usually characterized by severe pain on one or both sides of the head, an upset stomach, and, at times, disturbed vision. One-year prevalence of migraine ranges from 6 - 15% in adult men and from 14 - 35% in adult women. Migraine headaches may last a day or more and can strike as often as several times a week or as rarely as once every few years. Drug therapy for migraine is often combined with biofeedback and relaxation training. Sumatriptan is commonly used for relief of symptoms. Drugs used to prevent migraine include methysergide maleate, propranolol hydrochloride, ergotamine tartrate; amitriptyline, valproic acid, and verapamil.

Hemicrania continua, also a vascular headache, causes moderate pain with occasional severe pain on only one side of the head. At least one of the following symptoms must also occur; conjunctival injection and/or lacrimation, nasal congestion and/or rhinorrhea, or ptosis and/or miosis. Headache occurs daily and is continuous with no pain free periods. Hemicrania continua occurs mainly in woman, and its true prevalence is not known. Indomethacin usually provides rapid relief of symptoms. Other NSAIDs, including ibuprofen,

celecoxib, and naproxen, can provide some relief from symptoms. Amitriptyline and other tricyclic antidepressants are effective in some patients.

Cluster headache is a vascular headache that occurs in cyclical patterns or clusters of severe or very severe unilateral orbital or supraorbital and/or temporal pain. This type of headache is accompanied by at least one of the following autonomic symptoms: ptosis (drooping eyelid), conjunctival injection, lacrimation, rhinorrhea, and, less commonly, facial blushing, swelling, or sweating. Bouts of one headache every other day to 8 attacks per day may last from weeks to months, usually followed by remission periods when the headache attacks stop completely. The pattern varies from one person to another, but most people have one or two cluster periods a year. During remission, no headaches occur for months, and sometimes even years. The intense pain is caused by the dilation of blood vessels which creates pressure on the trigeminal nerve. While this process is the immediate cause of the pain, the etiology is not fully understood. Cluster headache is more common in men than in woman. One-year prevalence is estimated to be 0.5 to 1.0/1,000. Management of cluster headache consists of abortive and preventive treatment. Abortive treatments include subcutaneous injection of sumatriptan, topical anesthetics sprayed into the nasal cavity, and strong coffee. Some patients respond to rapidly inhaled pure oxygen. A variety of other pharmacologic and behavioral methods of aborting and preventing attacks have been reported with wide variation in patient response.

To date, the FDA has not cleared any occipital nerve stimulation device for treatment of headache. The Synergy IPG implanted stimulator device from Medtronic received marketing clearance in 1999 for management of chronic, intractable pain of the trunk or limbs, and off-label use for headache is described in the literature. Several devices are currently being investigated in clinical trials.

**Policy:** The use of occipital nerve stimulation for any indication is considered **INVESTIGATIVE** due to a lack of evidence demonstrating its impact on improved health outcomes.

**Coverage:** Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota medical policies apply generally to all Blue Cross and Blue Plus plans and products. Benefit plans vary in coverage and some plans may not provide coverage for certain services addressed in the medical policies.

Medicaid products and some self-insured plans may have additional policies and prior authorization requirements. Receipt of benefits is subject to all terms and conditions of the member's summary plan description (SPD). As applicable, review the provisions relating to a specific coverage determination, including exclusions and limitations. Blue Cross reserves the right to revise, update and/or add to its medical policies at any time without notice.

For Medicare NCD and/or Medicare LCD, please consult CMS or National Government Services websites.

Refer to the Pre-Certification/Pre-Authorization section of the Medical Behavioral Health Policy Manual for the full list of services, procedures, prescription drugs, and medical devices that require Pre-certification/Pre-Authorization. Note that services with specific coverage criteria may be reviewed retrospectively to determine if criteria are being met. Retrospective denial of claims may result if criteria are not met.

**Coding:**

*The following codes are included below for informational purposes only, and are subject to change without notice. Inclusion or exclusion of a code does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement.*

**CPT:**

64555 Percutaneous implantation of neurostimulator electrode array; peripheral nerve (excludes sacral nerve)

64575 Incision for implantation of neurostimulator electrode array; peripheral nerve (excludes sacral nerve)

**HCPCS:**

L8679 Implantable neurostimulator, pulse generator, any type

L8680 Implantable neurostimulator electrode (with any number of contact points), each

L8685 Implantable neurostimulator pulse generator, single array, rechargeable, includes extension

L8686 Implantable neurostimulator pulse generator, single array, nonrechargeable, includes extension

L8687 Implantable neurostimulator pulse generator, dual array, rechargeable, includes extension

L8688 Implantable neurostimulator pulse generator, dual array, nonrechargeable, includes extension

**Policy History:**

**Developed March 10, 2010**

**Most recent history:**

Reviewed March 9, 2011

Reviewed March 14, 2012

Reviewed March 13, 2013

Reviewed March 12, 2014

**Cross Reference:**

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