



MEDICAL POLICY STATEMENT GEORGIA MEDICAID

| Policy Name | Policy Number | Date Effective |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Facet Joint Interventions | MM-0974 | 11/01/2021-10/31/2022 |
| Policy Type | | |
| MEDICAL | Administrative | Pharmacy |
| | | Reimbursement |

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Medical Policy Statements prepared by CareSource and its affiliates do not ensure an authorization or payment of services. Please refer to the plan contract (often referred to as the Evidence of Coverage) for the service(s) referenced in the Medical Policy Statement. If there is a conflict between the Medical Policy Statement and the plan contract (i.e., Evidence of Coverage), then the plan contract (i.e., Evidence of Coverage) will be the controlling document used to make the determination.

According to the rules of Mental Health Parity Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of a behavioral health disorder will not be subject to any limitations that are less favorable than the limitations that apply to medical conditions as covered under this policy.

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A. Subject

Facet Joint Interventions

B. Background

Interventional procedures for management of acute and chronic pain are part of a comprehensive pain management care plan that incorporates conservative treatment in a multimodality approach. Multidisciplinary treatments include promoting patient self-management and aim to reduce the impact of pain on a patient's daily life, even if the pain cannot be relieved completely. Interventional procedures for the management of pain unresponsive to conservative treatment should be provided only by physicians qualified to deliver these health services.

Facet medial branch nerve blocks are one of the methods to diagnose and treat posterior biomechanical pain of the back which predominantly does not have a strong radicular component. Evidence supports the use of a facet medial branch nerve block as a diagnostic tool to identify the cause of pain and as an option for providing short term pain relief with the use of certain medications. A presumptive diagnosis of facet joint pain is made clinically. Evaluations include response to facet loading on physical examination, and plain radiography or axial imaging indicating facet hypertrophy localized to the painful region. This may be confirmed by relief of pain through injection of local anesthetic to the medial branches of the posterior rami of the dorsal spinal nerves supplying the proposed facet joint(s). Pain is predominantly axial (with the possible exception of facet joint cysts) and not associated with radiculopathy or neurogenic claudication. There must be no non-facet pathology that could explain the source of the patient's pain such as: fracture, tumor, infection, or significant deformity. Facet medial branch nerve blocks may be performed at the targeted joint itself, one joint above and one joint below on the same side, or bilaterally per treatment session. Facet medial branch nerve block injections should be performed with imaging guidance.

In the diagnostic phase, a patient receives an injection of a short-acting local anesthetic agent to identify the pain generator. For those whose pain recurs and persists to a moderate-severe degree after a positive diagnostic facet injection, interventional options may include a facet medial branch nerve block injection(s) or radiofrequency facet ablation (RFA), which ablates the nerve. In the therapeutic phase after a positive diagnostic block, a successful radiofrequency facet ablation of the affected (same anatomic location of the positive diagnostic block) nerve may relieve pain for a period of months to a year or more until nerve regeneration occurs.

The evidence for cervical spine facet medial branch nerve block injections is fair. Available literature for thoracic spine facet medial branch nerve block injections shows Level II scientific evidence (criteria as described by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality [AHRQ] and the US Preventative Services Task Force [USPSTF]) for



diagnostic accuracy in 3 studies with a total of less than 200 subjects. For additional injections, three reports exist with 76% to 90% achieving relief at 12 months, but without placebo controls. Evidence is Level I or II-1 for diagnostic lumbar facet medial branch nerve block injections and good for lumbar facet medial branch nerve block injections in 11 randomized trials.

Evidence for cervical spine radiofrequency facet ablation is Level II-1 (criteria as described by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality [AHRQ] and the US Preventative Services Task Force [USPSTF]). The average duration of pain relief greater than 50% from baseline is 7 to 9 months after initial cervical facet radiofrequency ablation. If indicated, repeat cervical radiofrequency facet ablation is successful 67% to 95% of the time. Evidence for lumbar spine radiofrequency facet ablation is Level II-2 with favorable results at less than 6 months post-procedure. The average pain relief greater than 50% from baseline is 9 months after initial lumbar radiofrequency facet ablation. If indicated, repeat lumbar radiofrequency facet ablation is successful 33% to 85% of the time, with subsequent relief enduring for an average of 12 months.

Professional Society Recommendations:

The following professional society's recommendations are derived from the latest guidelines and scientific based literature available.

American College of Physicians (ACP) (April 2017)

The ACP's recommendations for Noninvasive Treatments for Acute, Subacute and Chronic Low Back Pain: A Clinical Practice Guideline are as follows:

- Clinicians and patients should select nonpharmacological treatment with superficial heat (moderate-quality evidence), massage, acupuncture, or spinal manipulation (low-quality evidence). If pharmacologic treatment is desired, clinicians and patients should select nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or skeletal muscle relaxants (moderate-quality evidence);
- Clinicians and patients should initially select nonpharmacological treatment with exercise, multidisciplinary rehabilitation, acupuncture, mindfulness-based stress reduction, tai chi, yoga, motor control exercise, progressive relaxation, electromyography biofeedback, low-level laser therapy, operant therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy or spinal manipulation; and;
- In patients with chronic low back pain who have had an inadequate response to nonpharmacological therapy, clinicians and patients should consider pharmacologic treatment with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs as first line therapy, or tramadol or duloxetine as second-line therapy. Clinicians should only consider opioids as an option in patients who have failed the aforementioned treatments and only if the potential benefits outweigh the risks for individual patients and after a discussion of known risks and realistic benefits with patients.

C. Definitions

- **Zygapophyseal (aka facet) Joint “Level”** - refers to the zygapophyseal joint or the two medial branch (MB) nerves that innervate that zygapophyseal joint.



- **Diagnostic Medial Branch Nerve Block Injection** - refers to the diagnosis of facet-mediated pain requiring the establishment of pain relief following medial branch blocks (MBB) or intra-articular injections (IA). Neither physical exam nor imaging has adequate diagnostic power to confidently distinguish the facet joint as the pain source.
- **Radiofrequency Facet Ablation (RFA)** - is performed using percutaneous introduction of an electrode under fluoroscopic guidance to thermocoagulate medial branches of the dorsal spinal nerves.
- **Conservative Therapy** - is a multimodality plan of care. Multimodality care plans include ALL of the following:
 - **Active Conservative Therapies** - such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, a physician supervised home exercise program (HEP) or chiropractic care.
 - **Home Exercise Program (HEP)** - includes two components that are both required to meet CareSource policy for completion of conservative therapy:
 - An exercise prescription and/or plan documented in the medical record.
 - A follow up documented in the medical record regarding completion of a HEP (after suitable six (6) week period), or inability to complete a HEP due to a stated physical reason- i.e. increased pain or inability to physically perform exercises. (Patient inconvenience or noncompliance without explanation does not constitute “inability to complete”).
 - **Inactive Conservative Therapies** - such as rest, ice, heat, medical devices, acupuncture, TENS unit and prescription medications.
 - If a TENS unit is part of the care plan, the frequency of use, and duration of use with dates must be documented in the medical record. General statements in the medical record such as “Patient has a TENS unit” do not document use, and will not suffice to meet this policy criterion.
- **Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulator (TENS Unit)** - is a durable medical equipment device dispensed by prescription. It's use, frequency, duration, and start dates must be documented in the medical record to be considered part of conservative therapy during the period of prior authorization request.
- A “**successful**” **DIAGNOSTIC facet medial branch nerve block injection** - in this policy is defined as an injection that achieves greater than 50% reduction in pain within the duration of effectiveness for the anesthetic used.
- A “**successful**” **THERAPEUTIC facet medial branch nerve block injection** - in this policy is defined as an injection that achieves greater than 50% reduction in pain for at least three (3) months.

D. Policy

I. Facet Joint Interventions

- A. CareSource considers facet joint interventions for pain management medically necessary when the clinical criteria in this policy are met. Documentation, including dates of service, for conservative therapies are not required for medical necessity review, but must be available upon request.
 - 1. Patients with indwelling implanted spinal cord stimulators or pain pumps should include a device interrogation report with the required medical records for medical necessity review requests. If a device is not functioning



properly, an escalation in pain may warrant evaluation and management of the implanted device.

II. Medial Branch Nerve Block Injections

A. Up to two medial branch nerve block injections in the cervical/thoracic or lumbar regions are considered medically necessary.

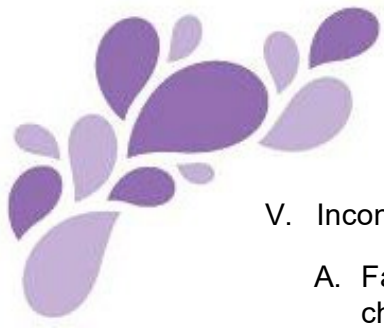
1. Only three (3) spinal levels (unilateral or bilateral) may be treated at the same time (maximum amount of six injections per rolling 12 months);
2. A response of at least 50% pain relief must be achieved before the second injection is performed; and
3. Injections should be at least two (2) weeks apart.

B. All of the following criteria must be met:

1. Patient must have a history of at least three (3) months of moderate to severe pain with functional impairment, and pain has not adequately responded to active or inactive conservative therapy.
2. Spine pain is predominantly located within the axial skeleton, non-radiating (not moving to another area) and is focused in the cervical, thoracic or lumbar spine area.
 - a. If pain is pseudo-radicular (pseudo-radicular pain does not radiate below the knee and is thought to be associated with local proximal disorders that do not affect any nerves or nerve roots), the medical record must state this finding.
3. A thorough history and physical exam documenting the cause of the pain (if known), duration of symptoms, severity, exacerbating factors, abnormal physical and diagnostic findings and prior conservative treatment measures is required.
4. Relevant imaging studies of the painful spinal region were completed within thirty-six (36) months prior to the date of this request, and there is no non-facet pathology that could explain the source of the patient's pain, such as fracture, tumor, infection, or significant deformity.
5. ACTIVE conservative therapy as part of a multimodality comprehensive approach is addressed in the patient's care plan with documentation in the medical record that includes at least ONE (1) of the following:
 - a. The patient has received ACTIVE conservative therapy lasting for six (6) weeks or more within the past six (6) months including ONE (1) of the following:
 01. Physical therapy;
 02. Occupational therapy;
 03. A physician supervised home exercise program (HEP) as defined in this policy.
 - b. OR, the medical record documents at least ONE (1) of the following exceptions to the six (6) weeks ACTIVE conservative therapy requirement in the past six (6) months:
 01. Moderate pain with significant functional loss at work or home
 02. Severe pain unresponsive to outpatient medical management
 03. Inability to tolerate non-surgical, non-injection care due to co-existing medical condition(s)



04. Prior successful injections for same specific condition with relief of at least three (3) months' duration.
 6. Inactive conservative therapy as part of a multimodality comprehensive approach is addressed in the patient's care plan with documentation in the medical record lasting for six (6) weeks or more within the past six (6) months including ONE (1) of the following:
 - a. Rest;
 - b. Ice;
 - c. Heat;
 - d. Medical devices;
 - e. TENS unit use as defined in this policy; or
 - f. Pain medications (RX or OTC) such as: non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), acetaminophen. Opioid narcotics are not required for consideration.
- III. Radiofrequency Facet Ablations (RFA)
- A. A maximum of four (4) radiofrequency facet ablations per rolling twelve (12) months (two left and two right per spinal region: cervical, thoracic or lumbar).
 - B. Radiofrequency Facet Ablations are considered medically necessary when ALL of the following have been met in the last thirty-six (36) months:
 1. The clinical criteria above (II, B 1-6) have been met and ONE (1) of the following:
 - a. Two (2) successful medial branch nerve block injections have been performed at the same spinal region achieving 50% or more pain relief;
OR
 - b. One (1) successful single or multilevel facet radiofrequency ablation session, in the same spinal region (cervical, thoracic or lumbar) and side providing at least 50% pain relief for a minimum of six (6) months.
 - C. Repeat Radiofrequency Facet Ablation
 1. Repeat Radiofrequency Facet Ablation in the same spinal region and side is considered medically necessary when ALL of the following have been met:
 - a. Documented pain relief of at least 50% or greater for a minimum of six (6) months after the initial RFA
 - b. A minimum of six (6) months following the initial RFA.
 2. Repeat diagnostic medial branch nerve block injections are not considered medically necessary if the member has had a successful RFA in the last thirty-six (36) months.
- IV. Sedation
- A. Neither conscious sedation nor Monitored Anesthesia Care (MAC) is routinely necessary for intra-articular facet joint injections or medial branch blocks and are not routinely reimbursable.
 1. Individual consideration may be given for payment in rare unique circumstances if the medical necessity of sedation is unequivocal and clearly documented.



V. Inconclusive or Non-Supportive Evidence

- A. Facet medial branch nerve block injections are unproven for the treatment of chronic spinal pain and routine periodic injections and will not be authorized for management of chronic pain.
- B. Intra-articular facet joint injections for neck and back pain has limited evidence and the efficacy is not established.
 - 1. Intra-articular facet joint injections is a third option for managing axial back pain, however due to poor evidence for efficacy of facet joint injections is not covered.
 - 2. Intra-articular facet joint injections also do not qualify as diagnostic information for a future proposed neurotomy.

E. Conditions of Coverage
 N/A

F. Related Polices/Rules
 N/A

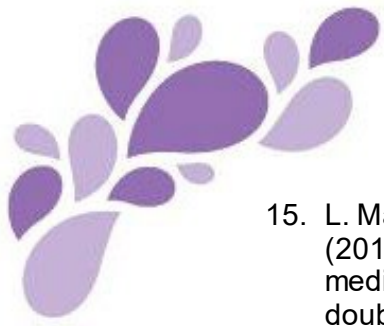
G. Review/Revision History

| | DATE | ACTION |
|-----------------------|------------|---|
| Date Issued | 05/13/2020 | This policy replaces the Facet Medial Branch Nerve Block and Radiofrequency Facet Ablation policies. Added criteria re: exclusion of repeat diagnostic injections for RFA. |
| Date Revised | 07/22/2020 | Revisions: Medial Branch Nerve Block injection clinical criteria; requirement of one “successful” RFA session. |
| | 11/11/2020 | Revision: RFA language revised around benefit limit for clarity. (This revision does not require a network notification or a change of the Effective Date). |
| | 07/21/2021 | Annual Update: Removed PA language. |
| Date Effective | 11/01/2021 | |
| Date Archived | 10/31/2022 | This Policy is no longer active and has been archived. Please note that there could be other Policies that may have some of the same rules incorporated and CareSource reserves the right to follow CMS/State/NCCI guidelines without a formal documented Policy. |



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The Medical Policy Statement detailed above has received due consideration as defined in the Medical Policy Statement Policy and is approved.

Independent medical review – 2/2018

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