Transanal Radiofrequency Treatment of Fecal Incontinence

Policy # 00571
Original Effective Date: 01/17/2018
Current Effective Date: 02/08/2021

Applies to all products administered or underwritten by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana and its subsidiary, HMO Louisiana, Inc.(collectively referred to as the "Company"), unless otherwise provided in the applicable contract. Medical technology is constantly evolving, and we reserve the right to review and update Medical Policy periodically.

Services Are Considered Investigational

Coverage is not available for investigational medical treatments or procedures, drugs, devices or biological products.

Based on review of available data, the Company considers transanal radiofrequency (RF) therapy as a treatment of fecal incontinence to be **investigational.***

Policy Guidelines

The Secca procedure may be performed on an outpatient basis using conscious sedation and a local anesthetic.

Background/Overview

Fecal Incontinence

Fecal incontinence is the involuntary leakage of stool from the rectum and anal canal. Fecal continence depends on a complex interplay of anal sphincter function, pelvic floor function, stool transit time, rectal capacity, and sensation. Etiologies vary and include injury from vaginal delivery, anal surgery, neurologic disease, and the normal aging process. Estimated prevalence is 8% of the adult population.

Treatment

Medical management includes dietary measures, such as the addition of bulk-producing agents to the diet and elimination of foods associated with diarrhea; antidiarrheal drugs for mild incontinence; bowel management programs, commonly used in patients with spinal cord injuries; and biofeedback. Surgical approaches primarily include sphincteroplasty, although more novel approaches, such as sacral neuromodulation or creation of an artificial anal sphincter, may be attempted in patients whose only other treatment option is the creation of a stoma. Radiofrequency (RF) energy also has been investigated as a minimally invasive treatment of fecal incontinence, a procedure referred to as the

Secca procedure. In this outpatient procedure using conscious sedation, RF energy is delivered to the sphincteric complex of the anal canal to create discrete thermal lesions. Over several months, these lesions heal and the tissue contracts, changing the tone of the tissue and potentially improving continence.

RF energy is a surgical tool that has been used for tissue ablation and more recently for tissue remodeling. For example, RF energy has been investigated as a treatment for gastroesophageal reflux disease (ie, the Stretta procedure), in which RF lesions are designed to alter the biomechanics of the lower esophageal sphincter; in orthopedic procedures to remodel the joint capsule; or in an intradiscal electrothermal annuloplasty procedure, in which the treatment is intended in part to modify and strengthen the disc annulus. In all of these procedures, nonablative levels of RF thermal energy are used to alter collagen fibrils, which results in a healing response characterized by fibrosis. Recently, RF energy has been explored as a minimally invasive treatment option for fecal incontinence.

FDA or Other Governmental Regulatory Approval

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

In 2002, the Secca™‡ System (Mederi Therapeutics) was cleared for marketing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) through the 510(k) process for "general use in the electrosurgical coagulation of tissue and is intended for use specifically in the treatment of fecal incontinence in those patients with incontinence to solid or liquid stool at least once per week and who have failed more conservative therapy." FDA product code: GEI.

Rationale/Source

Radiofrequency energy has been investigated as a minimally invasive treatment of fecal incontinence, in a procedure referred to as the Secca procedure. In this outpatient procedure using conscious sedation, radiofrequency energy is delivered to the sphincteric complex of the anal canal to create discrete thermal lesions. Over several months, these lesions heal and the tissue contracts, changing the tone of the tissue and improving continence.

For individuals who have fecal incontinence who receive transanal radiofrequency treatment, the evidence includes 8 nonrandomized studies. Relevant outcomes are symptoms, change in disease status, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity. Studies include a small number of patients,

and estimates of treatment differences are very imprecise. Study follow-up periods vary and need to be considerably longer and involve larger numbers of patients to evaluate long-term outcomes properly. Three-year follow-up of a small cohort showed decrement in response over time. Multicenter randomized controlled trials with sufficient power are required to evaluate the continuing use of this procedure as an alternative to other surgical interventions, physical therapies, or as an adjunctive treatment option for fecal incontinence. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

Supplemental Information

Practice Guidelines and Position Statements

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on radiofrequency treatment for fecal incontinence in 2011. NICE concluded that "evidence on endoscopic radiofrequency therapy of the anal sphincter for [fecal] incontinence raises no major safety concerns. There is evidence of efficacy in the short term but in a limited number of patients."

In 2016, NICE published a Medtech innovation briefing on the Secca system for fecal incontinence. These briefings aim to aid in the decision-making process by describing the technology, its role in the treatment pathway, the relevant published evidence, and cost information. These briefings do not contain recommendations. The briefing noted that "Secca therapy is a minimally invasive treatment option available for people with incontinence of solid or liquid stool at least once a week, in whom conservative management options have not controlled symptoms."

American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons

The American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons, in its 2015 clinical practice guidelines, noted: "Application of temperature-controlled radiofrequency energy to the sphincter complex may be used to treat fecal incontinence. Grade of Recommendation: Weak recommendation based on moderate-quality evidence, 2B." The guidelines also stated: "Because of the limitations in the available data, alternative treatments should be pursued before considering radiofrequency energy delivery."

American College of Gastroenterology
The American College of Gastroenterology published guidelines on the management of benign anorectal disorders in 2014. The guidelines indicated that there is insufficient evidence to recommend radiofrequency ablation to the anal sphincter as treatment for fecal incontinence. The College also asserted that the biologic rationale for this type of treatment is unproven.

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendations
Not applicable.

Medicare National Coverage
There is no national coverage determination. In the absence of a national coverage determination, coverage decisions are left to the discretion of local Medicare carriers.

Ongoing and Unpublished Clinical Trials
A search of ClinicalTrials.gov in August 2020 did not identify any ongoing or unpublished trials that would likely influence this review.

References

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Policy History

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01/04/2018	Medical Policy Committee review
01/17/2018	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. New policy.
01/10/2019	Medical Policy Committee review
01/23/2019	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
01/03/2020	Medical Policy Committee review
01/08/2020	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.
01/07/2021	Medical Policy Committee review
01/13/2021	Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.

Next Scheduled Review Date: 01/2022

Coding

The five character codes included in the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana Medical Policy Coverage Guidelines are obtained from Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®)‡, copyright 2020 by the American Medical Association (AMA). CPT is developed by the AMA as a listing of descriptive terms and five character identifying codes and modifiers for reporting medical services and procedures performed by physician.

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CPT is a registered trademark of the American Medical Association.

Codes used to identify services associated with this policy may include (but may not be limited to) the following:

Code Type	Code
CPT	46999
HCPCS	No codes
ICD-10 Diagnosis	All related diagnoses

*Investigational – A medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is Investigational if the effectiveness has not been clearly tested and it has not been incorporated into standard medical practice. Any determination we make that a medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is Investigational will be based on a consideration of the following:

A. Whether the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product can be lawfully marketed without approval of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and whether such approval has been granted at the time the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is sought to be furnished; or
B. Whether the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product requires further studies or clinical trials to determine its maximum tolerated dose, toxicity, safety, effectiveness, or effectiveness as compared with the standard means of treatment or diagnosis, must improve health outcomes, according to the consensus of opinion among experts as shown by reliable evidence, including:
    1. Consultation with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association technology assessment program (TEC) or other nonaffiliated technology evaluation center(s);
    2. Credible scientific evidence published in peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community; or
    3. Reference to federal regulations.

‡ Indicated trademarks are the registered trademarks of their respective owners.

NOTICE: If the Patient's health insurance contract contains language that differs from the BCBSLA Medical Policy definition noted above, the definition in the health insurance contract will be relied upon for specific coverage determinations.

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NOTICE: Medical Policies are scientific based opinions, provided solely for coverage and informational purposes. Medical Policies should not be construed to suggest that the Company recommends, advocates, requires, encourages, or discourages any particular treatment, procedure, or service, or any particular course of treatment, procedure, or service.