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Provider Bulletins

Total Joint Replacement- Understanding Documentation Requirements for Inpatient Admission

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Jurisdiction H (JH): Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Indian Health Service (IHS)/Tribal/Urban Indian and Veterans Affairs Providers

Novitas Solutions in concert with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is continuing to focus on lowering the Comprehensive Error Rate Testing (CERT) claims paid error rate. Currently, one area of concern identified in the CERT data is DRG 470 - Joint Replacement or Reattachment of Lower Extremity without major complications and comorbidities. Overpayments totaling over \$155,142.00 have been identified. More importantly, when CMS and CERT extrapolate these errors to the universe they will account for approximately \$146,000,000.00 in claims payment errors for the November 2012 report.

Total Knee Replacement

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons defines a knee replacement as "the resurfacing of the worn out surfaces of the knee and replacing the lost cartilage and diseased bone with metal and plastic." The most common reason for a knee replacement is arthritis and more specifically osteoarthritis. Symptoms include pain at the knee, decreased mobility, decreased range of motion, swelling at the knee, and stiffness. Non-surgical or conservative treatment options include exercise/physical therapy, pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medications, steroid injections, and a cane or walker to assist with mobility. When these conservative treatment options no longer provide relief to the patient, the decision to perform a total knee replacement may be made by the provider.

When claims reporting a total knee replacement are selected by CERT for review, the inpatient admission and stay are often denied because the procedure (total knee replacement) is denied as not medically reasonable and necessary. The denials are based on the lack of documentation by the provider supporting the signs and symptoms experienced by the patient and the conservative treatment that was attempted and failed.

In order to meet the criteria for a total knee replacement, the clinical review team looks for documentation to support the medical necessity of the total knee replacement. To meet medical necessity, the following are guidelines as to what should be documented in the patient's medical record and submitted to CERT or Novitas Solutions when requested for medical review:

- Documentation of pain at the knee, including the level of pain and worsening of pain
- Pain that is increased with activity
- Pain that is increased with weight bearing
- Pain that interferes with activities of daily living
- Pain with passive range of motion
- Limited range of motion
- Crepitus
- Joint effusion/swelling

An x-ray with at least two of the following findings:

- Subchondral cysts
- Subchondral sclerosis

- Periarticular osteophytes
- Joint subluxation
- Joint space narrowing

In addition, the documentation must indicate that there were continued symptoms after a trial of medication (i.e. NSAIDs) or the contraindications for use of medication (e.g., patient's inability to tolerate). There must also be documentation of a trial of physical therapy or external joint support (i.e. use of a cane, walker, brace, etc.) greater than or equal to 12 weeks or documentation as to why the patient was not able to tolerate physical therapy.

Total Hip Replacement

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons defines a total hip replacement as "removal of damaged cartilage and bone and replacement with metal, plastic, or ceramic joint surfaces to restore the alignment and function of the hip". As with knee replacements, the most common cause of hip deterioration is arthritis including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and traumatic arthritis.

Again, reviews have found that the documentation submitted for a total hip replacement does not support the signs and symptoms experienced by the patient and/or that conservative treatment was trialed and failed. Due to lack of supporting documentation, the total hip replacement and the inpatient admission are denied as not medically reasonable and necessary.

In order to meet the criteria for a total hip replacement, the clinical review team looks for documentation to support the medical necessity of the total hip replacement. To meet medical necessity the following are guidelines as to what should be documented in the patient's medical record and submitted to CERT or Novitas Solutions when requested for medical review:

- Pain at hip
- Pain increased with activity
- Pain increased with weight bearing
- Pain that interferes with activities of daily living
- Pain with passive range of motion
- Limited range of motion
- Antalgic gait

An x-ray with at least two of the following findings:

- Subchondral cysts
- Subchondral sclerosis
- Periarticular osteophytes
- Joint subluxation
- Joint space narrowing

As with the total knee replacement, the medical record documentation must indicate continued symptoms after a trial of medication (i.e. NSAIDs) or the contraindications for use of medication (e.g., patient's inability to tolerate). There must also be documentation of a trial of physical therapy or external joint support greater than or equal to 12 weeks or documentation as to why the patient was not able to tolerate physical therapy.

If you receive a request from the CERT contractor or from Novitas Solutions to provide documentation to support a total joint replacement, be sure to send the following:

- Hospital record that includes:
 - Admission history and physical.
 - Order for the inpatient admission.
- Physician office progress notes that includes:
 - Documentation of worsening symptoms not relieved with conservative treatments.
 - Confirmation the total joint replacement surgery was discussed and agreed upon by both the provider and the patient.

Note: To confirm medical necessity, and provide payment, for the hospital inpatient admission

(hospital record) **and** the total joint replacement (physician office progress notes) all the documentation described above must be received. Upon appeal of denied claims, Novitas Solutions is often able to obtain the necessary physician progress notes to support the medical necessity for the total joint replacement, but must still deny the inpatient admission due to the absence of the admission history and physical and admission order.

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