Overview

The purpose of this document is to describe the guidelines Neighborhood Health Plan (NHP) utilizes to determine the medical appropriateness for autologous chondrocyte implantation (ACI) for repairing cartilage defects of the knee. NHP may also consider FDA-approved matrix-induced chondrocyte implantation (e.g., MACI®, Vericel) as an acceptable alternative to autologous cultured chondrocytes (e.g., Carticel®) under the conditions listed in the coverage guidelines below. The treating specialist must request prior authorization for this procedure.

Coverage Guidelines:

NHP covers autologous chondrocyte implantation under the following conditions when symptoms of knee pain interfere with activities of daily living and have persisted for at least six months and when all of the following are met:

- Member is age 15–50 years of age; (If an adolescent member is evaluated, the member should be 15 years of age or older on the date of service and skeletally mature with documented closure of growth plates).
- Cartilage defect is isolated, full thickness and affecting >2.0 cm²;
- Cartilage defect involves the weight bearing areas of the femoral condyle (medial, lateral or trochlear) based on documentation from prior arthroscopic procedures;
- Femoral condyle defects are the result of acute or repetitive trauma;
- Prior conservative treatment including physical therapy, nonsteroidal medications, and steroid injections have failed to offer relief;
- There has been inadequate response to prior arthroscopic or other surgical repairs including debridement, microfracture, drilling/abrasion arthroplasty, mosaicplasty or osteochondral allograft/auto graft;
- Inadequate response to the prior procedure must be accompanied by supporting documentation that the member has complied with the prescribed rehabilitation program post procedure and despite this continues to have pain;
- Member must be willing to comply with a vigorous rehabilitation program post ACI procedure.

Instability of the knee may adversely affect the success of the procedure and should be corrected. The anterior and posterior cruciate ligaments should be free of laxity as well as stable and intact. It is recommended that cruciate deficiencies be corrected. Abnormal weight-distribution within the joint may adversely affect the success of the procedure and should be corrected. The tibial/femoral joint should be properly aligned.

Exclusions

NHP does not provide coverage for:

1. Joints other than the knee
2. Defects of the patella
3. Members with a BMI over 35
Definitions

**Autologous chondrocyte implantation:** a two-step procedure in which new cartilage cells are grown and then implanted in the cartilage defect. Healthy cartilage tissue is first removed from a non-weight bearing area of the bone and sent to a laboratory. The cells are cultured and increase in number over a 3- to 5-week period and are then transplanted back via a second procedure.

**Full thickness chondral defects** are those that extend through to the subchondral bone.

**Matrix-induced Autologous Chondrocyte Implantation (MACI):** MACI is autologous cultured chondrocytes on porcine collagen membrane. It is an autologous cellularized scaffold product that is indicated for the repair of single or multiple symptomatic, full-thickness cartilage defects of the adult knee, with or without bone involvement.

Effective
December 2017: Effective date.

References

American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) Articular Cartilage Restoration


