Medical Coverage Policy | Intensity-Modulated Radiotherapy: Abdomen and Pelvis

EFFECTIVE DATE: 02|15|2016
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OVERVIEW

Intensity-modulated radiotherapy (IMRT) may be an integral component in the treatment of cancers of the abdomen and pelvis. IMRT has been proposed as a method of radiotherapy that allows adequate radiation to the tumor while minimizing the radiation dose to surrounding normal tissues and critical structures.

MEDICAL CRITERIA

Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products

Intensity-modulated radiotherapy may be considered **medically necessary** as an approach to delivering radiotherapy for patients with cancer of the anus/anal canal.

When dosimetric planning with standard 3-dimensional conformal radiotherapy predicts that the radiation dose to an adjacent organ would result in unacceptable normal tissue toxicity, IMRT may be considered **medically necessary** for the treatment of cancer of the abdomen and pelvis, including but not limited to:

- stomach (gastric);
- hepatobiliary tract;
- pancreas;
- rectal locations; or
- gynecologic tumors (including cervical, endometrial, and vulvar cancers).

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Prior authorization is required for BlueCHiP for Medicare and recommended for Commercial Products via the online tool for participating providers.

POLICY STATEMENT

Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products

Intensity-modulated radiotherapy of the abdomen and pelvis may be considered medically necessary when the criteria above is met**.**

IMRT is considered not covered for BlueCHiP for Medicare and not medically necessary for Commercial Products for all other uses in the abdomen and pelvis.

COVERAGE

Benefits may vary between groups and contracts. Please refer to the appropriate Benefit Booklet, Evidence of Coverage or Subscriber Agreement for applicable radiology benefits/coverage.

BACKGROUND

Radiation Techniques

Conventional External-Beam Radiotherapy

Methods to plan and deliver radiotherapy have evolved in ways that permit more precise targeting of tumors with complex geometries. Most early trials used 2-dimensional treatment planning, based on flat images and radiation beams with cross-sections of uniform intensity that were sequentially aimed at the tumor along 2 or 3 intersecting axes. Collectively, these methods are termed conventional external-beam radiotherapy.

Three-Dimensional Conformal Radiation
Treatment planning evolved by using 3-dimensional images, usually from computed tomography (CT) scans, to delineate the boundaries of the tumor and discriminate tumor tissue from adjacent normal tissue and nearby organs at risk for radiation damage. Computer algorithms were developed to estimate cumulative radiation dose delivered to each volume of interest by summing the contribution from each shaped beam. Methods also were developed to position the patient and the radiation portal reproducibly for each fraction and immobilize the patient, thus maintaining consistent beam axes across treatment sessions. Collectively, these methods are termed 3-dimensional conformal radiotherapy (3D-CRT).

Intensity-Modulated Radiotherapy
IMRT uses computer software and CT and magnetic resonance images, to offer better conformality than 3D-CRT, because it modulates the intensity of the overlapping radiation beams projected on the target and uses multiple shaped treatment fields. Treatment planning and delivery are more complex, time-consuming, and labor intensive for IMRT than for 3D-CRT. The technique uses a multileaf collimator [MLC]), which, when coupled with a computer algorithm, allows for "inverse" treatment planning. The radiation oncologist delineates the target on each slice of a CT scan and specifies the target's prescribed radiation dose, acceptable limits of dose heterogeneity within the target volume, adjacent normal tissue volumes to avoid, and acceptable dose limits within the normal tissues. Based on these parameters and a digitally reconstructed radiographic image of the tumor, surrounding tissues, and organs at risk, computer software optimizes the location, shape, and intensities of the beam ports to achieve the treatment plan's goals.

Increased conformality may permit escalated tumor doses without increasing normal tissue toxicity and thus may improve local tumor control, with decreased exposure to surrounding normal tissues, potentially reducing acute and late radiation toxicities. Better dose homogeneity within the target may also improve local tumor control by avoiding underdosing within the tumor and may decrease toxicity by avoiding overdosing.

Technologic development has produced advanced techniques that may further improve RT treatment by improving dose distribution. These techniques are considered variations of IMRT. Volumetric modulated arc therapy delivers radiation from a continuous rotation of the radiation source. The principal advantage of volumetric modulated arc therapy is greater efficiency in treatment delivery time, reducing radiation exposure and improving target radiation delivery due to less patient motion. Image-guided RT involves the incorporation of imaging before and/or during treatment to more precisely deliver RT to the target volume.

IMRT methods to plan and deliver RT are not uniform. IMRT may use beams that remain on as MLCs move around the patient (dynamic MLC) or that are off during movement and turn on once the MLC reaches prespecified positions ("step and shoot" technique). A third alternative uses a very narrow single beam that moves spirally around the patient (tomotherapy). Each method uses different computer algorithms to plan treatment and yields somewhat different dose distributions in and outside the target. Patient position can alter target shape and thus affect treatment plans. Treatment plans are usually based on a single imaging scan, a static 3D-CT image. Current methods seek to reduce positional uncertainty for tumors and adjacent normal tissues by various techniques. Patient immobilization cradles and skin or bony markers are used to minimize day-to-day variability in patient positioning. In addition, many tumors have irregular edges that preclude drawing tight margins on CT scan slices when radiation oncologists contour the tumor volume. It is unknown whether omitting some tumor cells or including some normal cells in the resulting target affects outcomes of IMRT.

Note that the evidence for the following abdominal and pelvic cancers has not yet been reviewed and is beyond the scope of this review: bladder, kidney, ureter, and esophageal cancer and sarcoma.

CODING

Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products

A4648 Tissue marker, implantable, any type, each (Note: This code is not separately reimbursed for institutional providers.)

Note: To ensure correct pricing of HCPC code **A4648** for the Calypso 4D localization system, the procedure/clinical notes and the invoice must be submitted.

The following codes are covered for Medicare Advantage Plans and Commercial Products when the criteria above is met:

Intensity-modulated radiation therapy

77301 Intensity modulated radiotherapy plan, including dose-volume histograms for target and critical structure partial tolerance specifications

77338 Multi-lear collimator (MLC) device(s) for intensity modulated radiation therapy (IMRT), design and construction per IMRT plan

77385 Intensity modulated radiation treatment delivery (IMRT), includes guicance and tracking, when performed; simple (Institutional providers)

77386 Intensity modulated radiation treatment delivery (IMRT), includes guidance and tracking, when performed; complex (Institutional providers)

G6015 Intensity modulated treatment delivery, single or multiple fields/arcs, via narrow spatially and temporally modulated beams, binary, dynamic MLC, per treatment session: (Professional providers)

G6016 Compensator-based beam modulation treatment delivery of inverse planned treatment using 3 or more high resolution (milled or cast) compensator, convergent beam modulated fields, per treatment session: (Professional providers)

RELATED POLICIES

Preauthorization via Web-Based Tool for Procedures
Intensity Modulated Radiotherapy: Head, Neck and Thyroid
Intensity Modulated Radiotherapy: Central Nervous System
Intensity Modulated Radiotherapy: Breast and Lung
Intensity Modulated Radiotherapy: Prostate

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Provider Update, November 2021
Provider Update, January 2021
Provider Update, October 2019
Provider Update, December 2018
Provider Update, October 2017

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