

Subject: Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

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Description

This document addresses the use of intra-arterial mechanical embolectomy devices, also known as endovascular thrombectomy, for the treatment of acute thrombotic or embolic stroke. Mechanical embolectomy is designed to reopen occluded blood vessels in the brain by extracting occlusive thrombi or emboli from the cerebral vasculature.

Clinical Indications

Medically Necessary:

Intra-arterial mechanical embolectomy or thrombectomy is considered **medically necessary** in the treatment of ischemic stroke when any of the following criteria sets (I, II, III, or IV) have been met:

Criteria Set I:

- A. Angiographic studies have confirmed proximal arterial occlusion of the anterior circulation of the brain, in any of the following anterior intracranial arteries:
 - 1. Intracranial carotid; **or**
 - 2. Middle cerebral artery (M1 or M2); **or**
 - 3. Anterior cerebral artery (A1 or A2); **and**
- B. Intra-arterial mechanical embolectomy is performed within 6 hours of onset of symptoms; **and**
- C. NIH Stroke Scale (NIHSS) score of 2 or greater; **and**
- D. CT or MRI scan has ruled out intracranial hemorrhage or arterial dissection;

or

Criteria Set II:

- A. The individual was last known to be well 6 to 24 hours earlier; **and**
- B. There is occlusion of the intracranial internal carotid artery or first segment (M1) of the middle cerebral artery; **and**
- C. There is a mismatch between the severity of the clinical deficit and the infarct volume, as defined below:
 - 1. The individual is 80 years of age or older: NIHSS score of 10 or higher and an infarct volume of less than 21 ml; **or**
 - 2. Less than 80 years of age: NIHSS score of 10 or higher and an infarct volume of less than 31 ml; **or**
 - 3. Less than 80 years of age: NIHSS score of 20 or higher and an infarct volume from 31 to 50 ml; **and**
- D. CT or MRI scan has ruled out intracranial hemorrhage or arterial dissection;

or

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

Criteria Set III:

- A. The individual was last known to be well 6 to 16 hours earlier; **and**
- B. The individual has baseline NIHSS score greater than or equal to 6; **and**
- C. The individual has a modified Rankin Scale score less than or equal to 2 prior to qualifying stroke (functionally independent for all Activities of Daily Living [ADLs]); **and**
- D. There is occlusion of the intracranial internal carotid artery or proximal middle cerebral artery (M1); **and**
- E. There is a mismatch between ischemic tissue and infarct volume, as defined below:
 - 1. Initial infarct volume of less than 70 ml; **and**
 - 2. A ratio of the volume of ischemic tissue to infarct volume of 1.8; **and**
- F. CT or MRI scan has ruled out intracranial hemorrhage or arterial dissection;

or

Criteria Set IV:

- A. Confirmed occlusion of the basilar artery on angiographic studies; **and**
- B. The individual was last known to be well up to 24 hours earlier; **and**
- C. Baseline NIHSS falls into **one** of the following categories:
 - 1. NIHSS score of greater than or equal to 10 if individual presents within 12 hours of when last known to be well; **or**
 - 2. NIHSS score of greater than or equal to 6 if individual presents between 12 -24 hours of when last known to be well; **and**
- D. The individual has a modified Rankin score less than or equal to 2 prior to qualifying stroke; **and**
- E. Neuroimaging has ruled out intracranial hemorrhage.

Not Medically Necessary:

Intra-arterial mechanical embolectomy or thrombectomy is considered **not medically necessary** in the treatment of stroke in all other circumstances when the criteria above have not been met, including, but not limited to, embolectomy or thrombectomy of precerebral arteries.

Coding

The following codes for treatments and procedures applicable to this guideline are included below for informational purposes. Inclusion or exclusion of a procedure, diagnosis or device code(s) does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement policy. Please refer to the member's contract benefits in effect at the time of service to determine coverage or non-coverage of these services as it applies to an individual member.

When services may be Medically Necessary when criteria are met:**CPT**

For the following procedure codes when describing embolectomy/thrombectomy of middle cerebral, anterior cerebral, basilar or intracranial carotid arteries:

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

61645 Percutaneous arterial transluminal mechanical thrombectomy and/or infusion for thrombolysis, intracranial, any method, including diagnostic angiography, fluoroscopic guidance, catheter placement, and intraprocedural pharmacological thrombolytic injection(s)

ICD-10 Procedure

03CG3Z7 Extirpation of matter from intracranial artery using stent retriever, percutaneous approach
 03CG3ZZ Extirpation of matter from intracranial artery, percutaneous approach
 03CG4ZZ Extirpation of matter from intracranial artery, percutaneous endoscopic approach

ICD-10 Diagnosis

G45.0-G45.9 Transient cerebral ischemic attacks and related syndromes
 I63.12 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of basilar artery
 I63.30 Cerebral infarction due to thrombosis of unspecified cerebral artery
 I63.311-I63.319 Cerebral infarction due to thrombosis of middle cerebral artery
 I63.321-I63.329 Cerebral infarction due to thrombosis of anterior cerebral artery
 I63.39 Cerebral infarction due to thrombosis of other cerebral artery
 I63.40 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of unspecified cerebral artery
 I63.411-I63.419 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of middle cerebral artery
 I63.421-I63.429 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of anterior cerebral artery
 I63.49 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of other cerebral artery
 I63.81-I63.9 Cerebral infarction other or unspecified
 R29.702-R29.709 NIHSS score 2-9
 R29.710-R29.719 NIHSS score 10-19
 R29.720-R29.742 NIHSS score 20-42
 Z92.82 Status post administration of tPA (rtPA) in a different facility within the last 24 hours prior to admission to current facility

When services are Not Medically Necessary:

For the procedure and diagnosis codes listed above when criteria are not met, for the following diagnosis codes, or when the code describes a procedure indicated in the Clinical Indications section as not medically necessary.

ICD-10 Diagnosis

I63.00-I63.09 Cerebral infarction due to thrombosis of precerebral arteries
 I63.10-I63.119 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of unspecified precerebral or vertebral arteries
 I63.131-I63.19 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of carotid or other precerebral artery
 I63.20-I63.29 Cerebral infarction due to unspecified occlusion or stenosis of precerebral arteries
 I63.331-I63.349 Cerebral infarction due to thrombosis of posterior cerebral or cerebellar artery
 I63.431-I63.449 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of posterior cerebral or cerebellar artery
 I63.50-I63.59 Cerebral infarction due to unspecified occlusion or stenosis cerebral arteries

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

When services are also Not Medically Necessary:

For the following procedure and diagnosis codes, or when the code describes a procedure indicated in the Clinical Indications section as not medically necessary.

ICD-10 Procedure

- 03CH3Z7-03CJ4ZZ Extirpation of matter from common carotid artery [right or left, by approach, with or without stent retriever; includes codes 03CH3Z7, 03CH3ZZ, 03CH4ZZ, 03CJ3Z7, 03CJ3ZZ, 03CJ4ZZ]
- 03CK3Z7-03CL4ZZ Extirpation of matter from internal carotid artery [right or left, by approach, with or without stent retriever; includes codes 03CK3Z7, 03CK3ZZ, 03CK4ZZ, 03CL3Z7, 03CL3ZZ, 03CL4ZZ]
- 03CM3Z7-03CN4ZZ Extirpation of matter from external carotid artery [right or left, by approach, with or without stent retriever; includes codes 03CM3Z7, 03CM3ZZ, 03CM4ZZ, 03CN3Z7, 03CN3ZZ, 03CN4ZZ]
- 03CP3Z7-03CQ4ZZ Extirpation of matter from vertebral artery [right or left, by approach, with or without stent retriever; includes codes 03CP3Z7, 03CP3ZZ, 03CP4ZZ, 03CQ3Z7, 03CQ3ZZ, 03CQ4ZZ]
- 03CS3ZZ-03CT4ZZ Extirpation of matter from temporal artery [right or left, by approach; includes codes 03CS3ZZ, 03CS4ZZ, 03CT3ZZ, 03CT4ZZ]

ICD-10 Diagnosis

- G45.0-G45.9 Transient cerebral ischemic attacks and related syndromes
- I63.00-I63.09 Cerebral infarction due to thrombosis of precerebral arteries
- I63.10-I63.19 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of precerebral arteries
- I63.20-I63.29 Cerebral infarction due to unspecified occlusion or stenosis of precerebral arteries
- I63.331-I63.349 Cerebral infarction due to thrombosis of posterior cerebral or cerebellar artery
- I63.431-I63.449 Cerebral infarction due to embolism of posterior cerebral or cerebellar artery
- I63.50-I63.59 Cerebral infarction due to unspecified occlusion or stenosis cerebral arteries
- I63.81-I63.9 Cerebral infarction other or unspecified
- Z92.82 Status post administration of tPA (rtPA) in a different facility within the last 24 hours prior to admission to current facility

Discussion/General Information

A stroke is a condition where blood flow to the brain is interrupted to the extent that proper brain function is disrupted. Approximately 795,000 strokes occur annually in the United States. Ischemic strokes, caused by blockage of the blood vessels to the brain, accounts for approximately 85% of all strokes, and frequently results in neurologic emergencies (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2022). The use of tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), a drug that dissolves blood clots, is frequently given intravenously within 3 hours of symptoms for treatment of strokes due to blocked blood vessels. Mechanical embolectomy has been used to reopen occluded vessels in the brain, either alone or in conjunction with tPA treatment, by physically extracting occlusive thrombi from the cerebral vasculature.

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

Emboli extraction devices are designed to be placed into the affected artery and advanced to the site of the thrombi in the brain via imaging guidance. The thrombi is extracted using one or a combination of mechanical embolectomy devices.

Two types of devices can be used for mechanical thrombectomy. The first type of device is referred to as “stent retriever”, which use a stent-like metal structure to ensnare the target clot and remove it. Aspiration devices use negative pressure to remove the targeted clot. The choice between on devices may depend upon provider preference and stroke center availability.

Mechanical Embolectomy in the Anterior Circulation

Brouwer (2018) reported the results of a registry-based study involving 201 subjects with anterior ischemic stroke (AIS) of the internal carotid artery (ICA, 15.5%), middle carotid artery (MCA, 61.2%), the posterior circulation (11.9%), anterior cerebral artery (ACA, 0.5%), and a carotid T-occlusion (10.9%) receiving treatment within the 4.5-hour time window after arrival at the hospital. Intravenous tissue tPA was administered to 95 (47.3%) subjects prior to mechanical embolectomy. A modified Thrombolysis in Cerebral Infarction (mTICI) score of 2b–3 was achieved in 170 (84.6%) subjects treated with mechanical embolectomy, with or without tPA. In anterior circulation occlusions, 85.3% achieved mTICI 2b–3, while 79.2% with posterior circulation occlusions achieved mTICI 2b–3. Peri-procedural complications occurred in 11 subjects (5.4%; 5 non-flow limiting dissections, 2 vasospasms, 4 emboli to a new uninvolvement territory). When corrected for the subjects with pre-existing poor modified Rankin score (mRS) scores (mRS \geq 3), good functional outcome was achieved in 52.8%. A total of 26 subjects (12.9%) had died at 3-month follow-up.

Valente (2019) published the results of a single-arm, prospective, case series study that involved 29 subjects with large vessel occlusion AIS treated with the mechanical embolectomy. MCA was involved in 90% of subjects (M1 in 80%, M2 in 10%) and terminal ICA was involved in 10%. Successful reperfusion was obtained in 25 subjects (86%), with 4 requiring additional device use. Of the subjects treated with one embolectomy, successful reperfusion was reported in 76% of cases. No major device-related complications or distal emboli were reported.

Pereira and colleagues (2013) report on a prospective case series study involving 202 subjects between 10 and 85 years of age with occlusion of the anterior intracranial artery presenting within 8 hours after onset and who were refractory to IV thrombolysis. All participants were treated with mechanical embolectomy and a total of 59% of the subjects received intravenously administered tPA before the treatment with mechanical embolectomy. In the intent-to-treat analysis, the rate of the primary outcome of successful revascularization as measured by TICI \geq 2b after \leq 3 passes of the study device was reported as 79.2% (160/202). At the 90-day follow-up visit, favorable neurological outcome (mRS, 0-2) was seen in 57.9% of subjects. The frequency of total device- and procedure-related serious adverse events was 7.4%. Intracerebral hemorrhage (ICH) was found in 18.8% of subjects at 24 hours and symptomatic intracerebral hemorrhage (sICH) occurred in 1.5% of the subjects.

Campbell and others (2014, 2015) reported on the results of the Extending the Time for Thrombolysis in Emergency Neurological Deficits - Intra-Arterial (EXTEND-IA) trial, which was a prospective open-label, blinded

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

endpoint randomized, controlled trial (RCT) involving 70 subjects with radiologically confirmed intracranial occlusion. Subjects were assigned on a 1:1 basis to treatment with IV tPA alone (n=35) or IV tPA plus mechanical embolectomy (n=35). All subjects were treated within 6 hours of stroke onset and followed for 90 days post-intervention. The authors reported that the device group showed significantly better outcomes compared to controls with regard to the primary endpoints of probability of reperfusion without symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage at 24 hours (89% vs. 34%; $p<0.001$).

Two other similarly designed studies were published in 2015. Jovin and colleagues published the results of the Randomized Trial of Revascularization with mechanical embolectomy versus Best Medical Therapy in the Treatment of Acute Stroke Due to Anterior Circulation large Vessel Occlusion Presenting within Eight Hours of Symptom Onset (REVASCAT) study, which involved 206 subjects with radiologically confirmed intracranial occlusion. Subjects were assigned on a 1:1 basis to treatment with IV tPA alone (n=103) or IV tPA plus mechanical embolectomy (n=103). Unlike the EXTEND-IA study, subjects were treated within 8 hours of symptom onset. Recruitment was stopped early due to loss of equipoise at the first interim analysis. In addition, the publication of the Goyal, Campbell, and Berkhemer studies had raised ethical concerns of study continuation.

Dávalos and colleagues (2017) published the 1-year results of the REVASCAT study. Data was available for 205 of the original 206 subjects involved in the study (99.5%). The authors reported that at 12 months post-treatment the adjusted odds ratio (OR) for improvement in mRS score was 1.8 in favor of the device group.

The Thrombectomy as Primary Endovascular Treatment (SWIFT PRIME) study compared the use of thrombectomy plus intravenous tPA with intravenous tPA alone (Saver, 2015). The use of thrombectomy plus intravenous tPA significantly reduced disability at 90 days vs. tPA alone, as measured by mRS score ($p<0.001$). Additionally, the rate of functional independence (mRS score, 0 to 2) was higher in the device group compared to the control group (60% vs. 35%, $p<0.001$). No significant differences between groups were reported with regard to 90-day mortality (9% vs. 12%, $p=0.50$) or symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage (0% vs. 3%, $p=0.12$). In 2018, Al-Ajlan and colleagues published the results of a follow-up study of data from the REVASCAT trial. The authors concluded, “Endovascular treatment saves brain and improves 90-day clinical outcomes primarily through a beneficial effect on the 24-hour stroke severity.”

In 2017, Nogueira and colleagues published the results of the DAWN trial, an unblinded, multicenter RCT involving 206 subjects with occlusion of the intracranial carotid artery or proximal (first segment, M1) middle cerebral artery who had last been known to be well between 6 and 24 hours prior to treatment, who were randomized to treatment with either mechanical embolectomy plus standard care (n=107) or standard care alone (n=99). Subjects were further stratified into three groups, with group A being 80 years of age or older, having a score of 10 or higher in the NIHSS and an infarct volume less than 21 ml. Group B was younger than 80, had a NIHSS score of 10 or higher, and an infarct volume less than 31 ml. Group C was younger than 80, had a NIHSS score of 20 or higher, and an infarct volume of 31 to less than 51 ml. At 31 months, enrollment in the trial was stopped because of the results of a prespecified interim analysis. The mean score on the utility-weighted mRS at 90 days was 5.5 in the thrombectomy group vs. 3.4 in the control group (adjusted difference [Bayesian analysis], 2.0 points; 95% credible interval, 1.1 to 3.0; posterior probability of superiority, >0.999), and the rate of functional independence at 90 days was 49% in the thrombectomy group vs. 13% in the control group (adjusted difference, 33

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

percentage points; 95% credible interval, 24 to 44; posterior probability of superiority, > 0.999). The rate of sICH did not differ significantly between the two groups (6% in the thrombectomy group vs. 3% in the control group, $p=0.50$), nor did 90-day mortality (19% and 18%, respectively; $p=1.00$). The results of this study demonstrate significant benefit to the use of intra-arterial mechanical interventions in selected patients within 6 to 24 hours of time last known to be well.

Another RCT (DEFUSE 3 trial) reported on the use of mechanical embolectomy beyond 6 hours of onset of symptoms (Albers, 2018). This study, which was stopped early due to the primary efficacy endpoint being met during an interim analysis, involved 182 subjects with occlusion of the cervical or intracranial carotid artery or the proximal middle cerebral artery with an initial infarct volume of less than 70 ml and a ratio of volume of ischemic tissue to initial infarct volume of 1.8 or greater. Subjects were assigned on a 1:1 basis to receive treatment with mechanical embolectomy plus medical therapy ($n=92$) or medical therapy alone ($n=90$). Treatment was initiated 6 to 16 hours after the subject was last known to be well, including if they had awoken from sleep with symptoms. Assessments were conducted by blinded assessors with mRS and NIHSS score at 24 hours, 30 days, and 90 days. At 90 days mRS scores were significantly better in the embolectomy group (OR, 2.77, $p<0.001$). The authors concluded:

Endovascular thrombectomy for ischemic stroke 6 to 16 hours after a patient was last known to be well plus standard medical therapy resulted in better functional outcomes than standard medical therapy alone among patients with proximal middle-cerebral-artery or internal-carotid-artery occlusion and a region of tissue that was ischemic but not yet infarcted.

The results of this study demonstrate significant benefit to the use of intra-arterial mechanical interventions in selected patients within 6 to 16 hours of time last known to be well.

In 2018 Binning and colleagues published the results of a study involving data from a prospective device registry. The intent-to-treat population included 2008 subjects with large vessel occlusion with median NIHSS score of 16. The authors reported occlusion sites were ICA (17.8%), MCA (73.5%), posterior circulation (7.1%), and distal vascular locations (1.6%). The results included that the mTICI score 2b or 3 was achieved in 92.8% of subjects, with 55.3% achieving $RS \leq 2$ at 3 months. They also reported that subjects meeting revised 2015 American Heart Association (AHA) criteria for thrombectomy had a 59.7% mRS of 0 to 2 at 3 months, whereas 51.4% treated outside of AHA criteria had mRS of 0 to 2. The symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage rate was 1.7%.

In 2014, Berkhemer and others published the results of the Multicenter RCT of Endovascular Treatment for Acute Ischemic Stroke in the Netherlands (MR CLEAN). This RCT involved 500 subjects with imaging-confirmed intracranial major vessel occlusion who were eligible for treatment within 6 hours of stroke onset. Subjects were assigned to receive treatment with either usual care or usual care plus intra-arterial treatment, which may have included intra-arterial thrombolysis, mechanical embolectomy, or both. The selection of embolectomy device was left to the discretion of the treating investigator, and any FDA approved or CE marked device was eligible for use. Primary outcome of interest was 90-day mRS score, with secondary outcomes including scores on the NIHSS, Barthel index, EuroQol self-report questionnaire, and the ASPECTS. In total, 233 subjects were assigned to the intra-arterial treatment group and 267 to the control group. No intra-arterial therapy was undertaken in 37 of the

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

experimental group subjects, mechanical treatment was done in 195 subjects (of which 24 received additional intra-arterial thrombolysis), and 1 subject received intra-arterial thrombolysis only. The authors reported that the age-adjusted OR for having a favorable 90-day mRS was 1.67, in favor of the intra-arterial treatment group, regardless of the mRS category except death. The absolute between-group differences in the proportion of subjects who were functionally independent as measured by the mRS scores was 13.5% in favor of the intra-arterial treatment group, with an adjusted OR of 2.16. The NIHSS after 5-7 days was, on average, 2.9 points lower in the intra-arterial treatment group. Recanalization data was available for 394 of 500 subjects, and it was reported that absence of residual occlusion was more common in the intervention group (75.4% vs. 32.9%). No differences between groups were reported in relation to serious adverse events in the 90-day follow-up period. However, 13 of 233 (5.6%) intervention group subjects had clinical signs of new ischemic stroke in non-downstream vascular tree vs. only 1 control subject. Mortality was no different between groups at any time point measured. The results of this study demonstrate significant benefit to the use of intra-arterial mechanical interventions in selected patients within 6 hours of stroke onset.

In 2017 van den Berg and others published the 2-year outcome data from the MR CLEAN study. A total of 391 (78.2%) of the original 500 subjects had data available for the analysis of functional outcomes. The adjusted common OR mRS was 1.68, in favor of the intra-arterial treatment group vs. controls ($p=0.007$). The authors reported that subjects in the experimental group were more likely to have a good outcome vs. controls (mRS of 0 to 2, 37.1% vs. 23.9%, respectively, $p=0.003$).

The Endovascular Treatment for Small Core and Anterior Circulation Proximal Occlusion with Emphasis on Minimizing CT to Recanalization Times (ESCAPE) trial was a prospective open-label, blinded endpoint RCT involving 316 subjects with radiologically confirmed intracranial occlusion randomized to undergo treatment with either standard treatment with IV tPA or standard of care plus mechanical embolectomy (Goyal, 2015). Due to the positive outcomes reported in the MR CLEAN trial, the data safety and monitoring board recommended early suspension and interim analysis of the study with only 243 completing the 90-day endpoint. Following analysis, the board concluded that recruitment should be ended and the existing subjects followed to endpoint completion. The common OR of 2.6 was reported, favoring the experimental group ($p<0.001$). The median mRS at 90 days was 2 in the experimental group and 4 in the control group ($p<0.0010$). Mortality at 90 days was 10.4% for the experimental group vs. 19.0% in controls ($p=0.04$). No differences between groups were reported for the incidence of intracerebral hemorrhage ($p=0.75$).

Mechanical Embolectomy in the Posterior Circulation

Treatment for AIS within the anterior circulation is well established; recent studies have focused on the role of mechanical embolectomy for posterior circulation occlusions continues to be evaluated (Meyer, 2020; Stambo, 2020; Watson, 2020; Zhao, 2020). A systematic review conducted by Meyer (2020) found that successful recanalization occurred in 86% (37/43) of individuals. The mTICI measured 3 (2b is successful with $\geq 50\%$ reperfusion) in those with a first pass-effect (48.8%, 21/43). sICH occurred in 7% (3/43), 1 perforation and 2 iatrogenic vessel dissections; the in-hospital mortality rate was 9.3% (4/43). Stambo and colleagues (2020)

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

published results of a retrospective cohort study of individuals with posterior cerebral artery occlusions treated with endovascular treatment or best medical therapy. Of the individuals treated with stent retrievers, 68% (13/19) had complete recanalization at 24 hours. Although initial outcomes were promising, the frequency of sICH and 3-month mortality were similar between those treated with stent retrievers and individuals treated with best medical therapy. Watson and colleagues (2020) published the results of a systematic review for mechanical thrombectomy treatment of acute posterior circulation occlusions. A total of 1612 individuals with acute posterior circulation AIS were treated and successful reperfusion was achieved in 86%. However, there was also an average rate of 16% (132/840, with numerous studies not reporting adverse events) of periprocedural and postoperative complications and a 30% mortality rate. Zhao and colleagues (2020) conducted a meta-analysis and systematic review for the safety and efficacy of mechanical thrombectomy for posterior versus anterior large vessel occlusions. The authors reported that reperfusion rates were similar for anterior and posterior recanalization, but the mortality rate was higher for individuals with posterior occlusions (OR=1.98; 95% confidence interval [CI], 1.37-2.87; p=0.0003).

Meinel (2019) reported the results of a study involving 1739 subjects included in the retrospective observational BEYOND-SWIFT registry who had large vessel occlusion treated with thrombectomy. Mechanical embolectomy was conducted in subjects with either basilar artery occlusion (n=165) or anterior circulation large vessel occlusion (ACLVO) (n=1574). Complete 90-day follow-up data were available in 152 (91.1%) of the basilar group. It was not clear what percentage of the ACLVO group completed the 90-day follow-up. Compared to the ACLVO group at baseline, the basilar group was significantly different with regard to age (younger), gender (more males), transferred from other hospitals (more frequent), symptom severity and glucose (both higher), anticoagulation pretreatment, hypertension, and dyslipidemia (all lower) (p<0.05 for all). Time from symptom onset to groin puncture was longer in basilar group vs. the ACLVO group (p<0.001). Recanalization of mTICI 2b/3 was achieved in 90.3% of basilar group subjects vs. 82.7% of ACLVO subjects (p=0.11). Intracranial stents were used in significantly more basilar group subjects (17.0% vs 2.3%, p<0.001). Longer times from symptom onset to groin puncture were also reported (300 min vs 225 min, p<0.001). The authors reported no significant differences in the rates of sICH, systemic bleeding, craniectomy, and complication rates. However, subjects in the basilar group had significantly more frequent nonhemorrhagic worsening postoperatively. Overall, the basilar group had worse outcomes, with mRS scores 0-3 reported in 46.1% in the basilar group vs. 56.7% in the ACLVO group (p=0.013), and higher mortality rates of 36.2% vs. 24.4%, respectively (p=0.002). However, the authors stated that after adjustment for baseline differences, no significant differences in outcomes were found, with the exception of futile recanalization, which was more frequent in the basilar group (aOR, 2.146). On unadjusted analysis, better outcomes were observed in basilar group subjects vs. those without successful recanalization. However, significantly higher rates of independence at 3 months were found only in the cohort of subjects presenting with ACLVO. The authors concluded that in selected individuals, similar outcomes can be achieved with mechanical embolectomy of the basilar artery as those in the anterior circulation, but that additional research was needed to establish proper selection criteria and interventional strategies to avoid futile recanalization.

Liu and colleagues (2020) reported the findings of a randomized, open-label, blinded outcome assessment study involving 131 subjects with vertebrobasilar occlusion presenting at < 8 hours. The trial was terminated early due to high crossover rate and poor recruitment. The intention-to-treat analysis included 130 subjects who were treated with either thrombectomy (n=66) or medical therapy (n=65). The type of thrombectomy devices were not specified but included both stent retrievers and aspiration catheters. The authors reported evidence of a difference in the

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

proportion of participants with mRS 0-3 at 90 days according to treatment (42% in the thrombectomy group vs. 32% in the control group; OR, 1.74). A secondary, prespecified analysis of the primary outcome was done to assess the effect of crossovers. It demonstrated higher rates of mRS 0-3 at 90 days in subjects who received thrombectomy vs. those who received medical therapy alone in both per-protocol analysis (44% vs. 25%, aOR, 2.90) and in the intent-to-treat analysis (47% vs. 24%, aOR, 3.02) at 90-days. Mortality was similar between groups despite a higher prevalence of sICH in the thrombectomy group (33% vs. 38%, $p=0.54$). The authors concluded,

There was no evidence of a difference in favorable outcomes of patients receiving endovascular therapy compared with those receiving standard medical therapy alone. Results might have been confounded by loss of equipoise over the course of the trial, resulting in poor adherence to the assigned study treatment and a reduced sample size due to the early termination of the study.

Meyer and colleagues (2021) reported the results of the TOPMOST study, a multicenter case-control trial involving subjects with primary distal occlusion of the P2 or P3 segments of the posterior cerebral artery treated with either mechanical embolectomy or medical therapy. The type of embolectomy devices used was not specified, but it was stated that both stent retrievers and aspiration catheters were used. Of the 313 subjects with posterior circulation distal medium vessel occlusion (DMVO) receiving treatment, 243 met inclusion criteria, and 184 subjects were compared by treatment group after 1:1 propensity score matching ($n=92$ subjects in each group, thrombectomy vs. medical therapy). At baseline, diabetes as a cardiovascular risk factor was significantly higher in the control group vs. the thrombectomy group (30 vs. 14, respectively, $p=0.006$). Additionally, the medical therapy group received intravenous thrombolysis significantly more frequently than and thrombectomy group, both before and after propensity matching, (39% vs. 56%, $p=0.01$ and 40% vs. 57.7%, $p=0.01$, respectively). A total of 141 subjects received mechanical thrombectomy, with first pass being done with a stent retriever with or without aspiration in 72% of subjects and 26% of subjects undergoing direct distal aspiration. Successful first pass reperfusion (mTICI 3) occurred in 45.5% of cases. Additional passes increased the overall success rate to 76.2%. Distal embolization to another vessel was reported in 5 subjects (3.5%), with successful recanalization of those locations in 3 subjects. Post-propensity score matching, mean baseline NIHSS scores had decreased from admission in both groups, with there being no significant differences between groups (-2 in the thrombectomy group vs. -1.5 in the medical group, $p=0.06$). However, there was a significant benefit in favor of subjects in the thrombectomy group with > 10 NIHSS score on admission vs. the medical group (mean difference 5.6, $p=0.04$). No significant differences between groups were also noted in the subgroup of subjects with an mTICI of 2a or lower ($p=0.13$). In the thrombectomy group two independent factors were identified for predicting successful early neurological improvement, higher NIHSS scores ($p<0.001$) and successful first pass effect ($p=0.04$). In the medical group, only the presence of P3 occlusions were predictive of successful early neurological improvement ($p=0.021$). At 90 days, excellent neurological outcomes (mRS ≤ 1) were reported in 66.2% of thrombectomy group subjects vs. 54.4% of medical group subjects. No p -values were provided for this comparison. sICH was reported in 4.3% of subjects in both groups. Similarly, overall mortality was 4.9% in both groups at 90 days. The authors concluded that the study suggested that "...mechanical thrombectomy for posterior circulation DMVO is a safe, and technically feasible treatment option for occlusions of the P2 or P3 segment of the PCA compared with standard medical treatment with or without IVT." However, additional rigorous studies should be conducted to confirm these findings.

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

Langezaal (2021) reported the results of an RCT involving 300 subjects with basilar artery occlusion assigned to treatment with either mechanical embolectomy (n=154) or medical therapy (n=146). The investigators used a variety of devices, including the MERCI, Penumbra, Solitaire, and Trevo devices. All subjects were followed for a minimum of 90 days. At baseline, the embolectomy group had a significantly higher rate of atrial fibrillation (28.6% vs. 15.1%, no p-value provided). Crossover occurred in 3 subjects (1.9%) in the embolectomy group and 7 (4.8%) in the medical therapy group. No significant differences were reported between groups in the number of subjects with favorable outcomes as defined as an mRS 0-3 at 90 days (44.2% vs. 37.7%, p=0.19). Favorable reperfusion (mTICI of 2b or 3) was reported in 72% of the endovascular subjects, but no data was provided for the medical therapy group. However, arterial patency based on CTA was reported in 84.5% in the embolectomy group vs. 56.3% in the medical group (no p-value provided). No difference in 90-day mortality was reported (38.3% vs. 43.2%, respectively, p=0.29). Similarly risk of sICH at 3 days was not significantly different (4.5% vs. 0.7%, p=0.06). The authors concluded,

Among patients with stroke from basilar-artery occlusion, endovascular therapy and medical therapy did not differ significantly with respect to a favorable functional outcome, but, as reflected by the wide confidence interval for the primary outcome, the results of this trial may not exclude a substantial benefit of endovascular therapy. Larger trials are needed to determine the efficacy and safety of endovascular therapy for basilar-artery occlusion.

Hendrix (2022) reported the results of a case series study involving 831 subjects with large vessel occlusions treated with mechanical embolectomy, 77 of which were in the posterior circulation. The investigators conducted a univariable analysis in 77 subjects with posterior circulation obstructions to assess clinical predictors of a favorable functional outcome among posterior circulation LVO. They reported that lower baseline NIHSS, negative smoking history, primary aspiration, and TICI 2b/3 revascularization were associated with mRS 0-3. In multivariable analysis, primary aspiration and TICI 2b/3 revascularization remained independently associated with achieving mRS 0-3 among posterior circulation obstruction. Futile revascularization was observed in 32 of 63 (50.8%) cases. The authors concluded that subjects with anterior and posterior vessel obstructions undergoing mechanical embolectomy have distinct clinical profiles and the use of primary aspiration appears fundamental for beneficial outcomes in subjects with posterior vessel obstruction.

Xun (2021) reported on a meta-analysis of 33 studies to investigate the prognostic factors for successful mechanical embolectomy in subjects with posterior vessel occlusion. Gender (p=0.428), atrial fibrillation (p=0.870), smoking (p=0.118), or coronary artery disease (p=0.361) were not found to be prognostic factors for poor outcomes. However, the pre-event presence of hypertension (p<0.001), diabetes mellitus (p<0.001), hyperlipidemia (p<0.021), and previous stroke history (p=0.042) were prognostic for poor outcomes.

Tao and associates (2022) reported on the results of a multicenter, prospective RCT which compared the clinical outcomes of individuals who received endovascular thrombectomy or best medical care following basilar artery occlusion stroke in the Endovascular Treatment for Acute Basilar-Artery Occlusion (ATTENTION) trial. Participants had a moderate-to-severe acute ischemic stroke with a NIHSS score of 10 or higher, where seen within 12 hours of last known time to be well and had a prestroke modified Rankin score of 2 or less. Participants were randomized to either the endovascular thrombectomy treatment and best medical care group (n=228) or the best

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

medical care group alone (n=114). Best medical care included intravenous thrombolytic agents, antiplatelet drugs, anticoagulation, or combinations of these treatments. The primary outcome was a good functional status as defined by a modified Rankin score of 0-3 at 90 days. Good functional status was achieved in 46% of the treatment group compared to 23% of the control group (adjusted rate ratio [ARR]: 2.06; 95% CI: 1.46 to 2.91; $p < 0.001$). A higher number of individuals in the control group died within 90 days compared to the treatment group (55% versus 37%; (ARR: 0.66; 95% CI, 0.52 to 0.82). In the treatment group, the authors reported 5% rate of symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage while there were no cases in the control group. The treatment group reported a 14% procedural complication rate.

Also in 2022, Jovin and colleagues reported on second randomized trial comparing thrombectomy plus best medical care (n=110) to best medical care alone (n=108) in the Basilar Artery Occlusion Chinese Endovascular (BAOCHE) trial. Individuals were eligible if confirmed occlusion of the basilar artery or intracranial segment of both vertebral arteries that could be treated within 6 to 24 hours after symptom onset. Participants also had a prestroke modified Rankin score of 0 or 1, a NIHSS score of 10 or higher. The NIHSS score requirement was later reduced to 6 or higher due to slow recruitment. The primary outcome was a good functional status as defined by a modified Rankin score of 0-3 at 90 days. Good functional status was achieved in 46% of the treatment group compared to 24% of the control group (adjusted rate ratio, 1.81; 95% CI: 1.26 to 2.60; $p < 0.001$; respectively). Mortality at 90 days was higher in the control group compared to the thrombectomy group (42% versus 31%; ARR: 0.75; 95% CI: 0.54 to 1.04; respectively). The incidence of symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage was higher in the thrombectomy group. The trial was stopped early based on the efficacy of the thrombectomy added to best medical care.

Basilar artery occlusion is typically associated with poor outcomes. The results of the ATTENTION and BAOICHE trials show that embolectomy along with best medical care providers improved clinical outcomes for the treatment of stroke due to basilar artery occlusion in individuals with specific clinical characteristics. These studies were associated with increased risk of complications. Further studies are needed to determine whether the benefit of thrombectomy outweighs the risk in an expanded set of individuals who present with posterior circulation occlusions.

Other Information

The American Heart Association and American Stroke Association (AHA/ASA) *Focused Update of the 2013 Guidelines for the Early Management of Patients with Acute Ischemic Stroke* (Powers, 2015) recommends that:

2. Patients should receive endovascular therapy with a stent retriever if they meet all the following criteria (Class I; Level of Evidence A). (New recommendation):
 - a. Prestroke mRS score 0 to 1,
 - b. Acute ischemic stroke receiving intravenous r-tPA within 4.5 hours of onset according to guidelines from professional medical societies,
 - c. Causative occlusion of the ICA or proximal MCA (M1),
 - d. Age ≥ 18 years,
 - e. NIHSS score of ≥ 6 ,
 - f. ASPECTS of ≥ 6 , and

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

- g. Treatment can be initiated (groin puncture) within 6 hours of symptom onset
3. As with intravenous r-tPA, reduced time from symptom onset to reperfusion with endovascular therapies is highly associated with better clinical outcomes. To ensure benefit, reperfusion to TICI grade 2b/3 should be achieved as early as possible and within 6 hours of stroke onset (Class I; Level of Evidence B-R). (Revised from the 2013 guideline)
4. When treatment is initiated beyond 6 hours from symptom onset, the effectiveness of endovascular therapy is uncertain for patients with acute ischemic stroke who have causative occlusion of the ICA or proximal MCA (M1) (Class IIb; Level of Evidence C). Additional randomized trial data are needed. (New recommendation)
5. In carefully selected patients with anterior circulation occlusion who have contraindications to intravenous r-tPA, endovascular therapy with stent retrievers completed within 6 hours of stroke onset is reasonable (Class IIa; Level of Evidence C). Inadequate data are available at this time to determine the clinical efficacy of endovascular therapy with stent retrievers for those patients whose contraindications are time based or not time based (eg, prior stroke, serious head trauma, hemorrhagic coagulopathy, or receiving anticoagulant medications). (New recommendation)
6. Although the benefits are uncertain, the use of endovascular therapy with stent retrievers may be reasonable for carefully selected patients with acute ischemic stroke in whom treatment can be initiated (groin puncture) within 6 hours of symptom onset and who have causative occlusion of the M2 or M3 portion of the MCAs, anterior cerebral arteries, vertebral arteries, basilar artery, or posterior cerebral arteries (Class IIb; Level of Evidence C). (New recommendation)
7. Endovascular therapy with stent retrievers may be reasonable for some patients <18 years of age with acute ischemic stroke who have demonstrated large-vessel occlusion in whom treatment can be initiated (groin puncture) within 6 hours of symptom onset, but the benefits are not established in this age group (Class IIb; Level of Evidence C). (New recommendation)
8. Although its benefits are uncertain, the use of endovascular therapy with stent retrievers may be reasonable for patients with acute ischemic stroke in whom treatment can be initiated (groin puncture) within 6 hours of symptom onset and who have prestroke mRS score >1, ASPECTS <6, or NIHSS score <6 and causative occlusion of the ICA or proximal MCA (M1) (Class IIb; Level of Evidence B-R). Additional randomized trial data are needed. (New recommendation)
9. Observing patients after intravenous r-tPA to assess for clinical response before pursuing endovascular therapy is not required to achieve beneficial outcomes and is not recommended. (Class III; Level of Evidence B-R). (New recommendation)
10. Use of stent retrievers is indicated in preference to the MERCI device. (Class I; Level of Evidence A). The use of mechanical thrombectomy devices other than stent retrievers may be reasonable in some circumstances (Class IIb, Level B-NR). (New recommendation)

Mokin and others (2018) evaluated pooled real-world data from 830 subjects with anterior circulation acute ischemic stroke in the NASA and TRACK registries to compare outcomes of subjects presenting within the first hours 6 vs. beyond 6 hours of stroke symptom onset. A total of 32.7% (271/830) underwent thrombectomy beyond the first 6 hours of symptom onset. Subjects were stratified to those treated within 6 hours, between 6 and 16 hours, and between 16 and 24 hours. The authors reported that the rates of “good” clinical outcome, defined as mRS of 0-2 at 90 days, were similar between groups (48.1% for ≤ 6 hours, 46.2% for > 6 ≤ 16 hours, and 38% for > 16 hours,

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

p=0.08). Mortality was likewise similar (20.6%, 21.6%, and 3.3%, respectively, p=0.06), as was symptomatic intracranial hemorrhage (8.0%, 10.9%, and 5%, respectively, p=0.5). The rates of successful recanalization, defined as TICI 2b/3, were 79.4% in subjects with stroke within 0-6 hours, 72.6% within 6-16 hours, and 85.0% within 16-24 hours (p=0.04). They concluded that the real-world experience in subjects with anterior circulation AIS treated with the Solitaire and Trevo devices beyond the first 6 hours of symptom onset proved to be equally safe and effective as for individuals with symptom onset within the first 6 hours.

In 2018 the American Heart Association Council on Cardiovascular Radiology and Intervention and Stroke Council published their indications for the performance of intracranial endovascular neurointerventional procedures (Eskey, 2018). In this document they provided the following recommendations:

2. Endovascular therapy with stent retrievers is recommended over intra-arterial fibrinolysis as first line therapy.
4. Use of stent retrievers is preferred over other mechanical thrombectomy devices. The use of mechanical thrombectomy devices other than stent retrievers may be reasonable in some circumstances but is not yet supported by large RCTs.
5. In carefully selected patients with anterior circulation occlusion who have contraindications to intravenous r-tPA, endovascular therapy with stent retrievers completed within 6 hours of stroke onset is reasonable. Inadequate data are available at this time to determine the clinical efficacy of endovascular therapy in such patients (eg, those with prior stroke, serious head trauma, hemorrhagic coagulopathy, or receiving anticoagulant medications).
8. When treatment is initiated beyond 6 hours from symptom onset, the effectiveness of endovascular therapy is uncertain for patients with AIS who have causative occlusion of the ICA or proximal MCA (M1). New trial results addressing this topic will be available in the near future.
9. Patients should receive endovascular therapy with a stent retriever if they meet all the following criteria: (1) prestroke mRS score of 0 to 1, (2) AIS receiving intravenous r-tPA within 4.5 hours of onset according to guidelines from professional medical societies, (3) causative occlusion of the ICA or proximal MCA (M1), (4) age ≥ 18 years, (5) NIHSS score of ≥ 6 , (6) ASPECTS of ≥ 6 , and (7) ability to initiate treatment (groin puncture) within 6 hours of symptom onset.

Summary

The available evidence addressing the use of mechanical embolectomy devices is extensive. A number of prospective and retrospective studies focusing on specific devices have been published showing improved health outcomes over medical therapy in AIS of the anterior circulation (Kaesmacher, 2019; Mattle, 2019; Nogueira, 2022; Penumbra Pivotal Stroke Trial Investigators, 2009; Tarr, 2010; Tarr, 2018; Zaidat, 2018a; Zaidat, 2018c, Zaidat, 2022). Additionally, data from large, well-designed, and conducted studies (Berkhemer, 2014; Campbell, 2014, 2015; Goyal, 2015; Joval, 2015; Saver, 2015) have demonstrated significant benefits to mechanical embolectomy/thrombectomy in select individuals. Mechanical embolectomy, used in conjunction with medical therapy is associated with greater complications than medical therapy alone, but has the potential to prevent severe disability and improve mortality.

Definitions

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Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Stroke

Alberta Stroke Program Early Computed Tomography Score (ASPECTS): A 10-point quantitative topographic CT scan score developed to assess early ischemic changes on pretreatment CT studies in individuals with acute ischemic stroke of the anterior circulation. ASPECTS is determined from evaluation of two standardized regions of the MCA territory, including the basal ganglia level and the supraganglionic level. The abnormality should be visible on at least two consecutive cuts to ensure that it is truly abnormal rather than a volume averaging effect. To compute the ASPECTS, 1 point is subtracted from 10 for any evidence of early ischemic change for each of the defined regions. A normal CT scan receives ASPECTS of 10 points. A score of 0 indicates diffuse involvement throughout the MCA territory.

Embolectomy: Surgical removal of an obstructing clot or foreign material which has been transported from a distant vessel by the bloodstream.

Emboli: Material (usually a blood clot but may be fat or a bone fragment, etc.) that travels through the circulation and eventually obstructs blood flow through a smaller caliber vessel.

National Institute of Health Stroke Scale (NIHSS): A systematic assessment tool that provides a quantitative measure of stroke-related neurologic deficit. The scale is widely used as a clinical assessment tool to evaluate acuity of stroke patients, determine appropriate treatment, and predict patient outcome. It is a 15-item neurologic examination evaluating the effect of acute cerebral infarction on the levels of consciousness, language, neglect, visual-field loss, extraocular movement, motor strength, ataxia, dysarthria, and sensory loss. The Score is intended to be used by a trained observer who rates an individual's ability to answer questions and perform activities. Ratings for each item are scored with 3 to 5 grades with 0 as normal, and there is an allowance for untestable items. The single assessment requires less than 10 minutes to complete.

Neurovasculature: The blood vessel network of the neck and brain.

Plasmin: A proteolytic enzyme that is formed from plasminogen in blood plasma and dissolves the fibrin in blood clots; also called fibrinolysin.

Precerebral arteries: An arterial blood vessel leading to the cerebrum (but not in the cerebrum), including the vertebral artery, basilar artery, carotid artery, and ascending aorta.

Stroke: A condition where blood flow to the brain is interrupted to the extent that proper brain function is disrupted.

Thrombolytics: Drugs that dissolve blood clots.

Tissue plasminogen activator (tPA): An enzyme that dissolves blood clots. It can be produced naturally by cells in the walls of blood vessels or prepared through the use of genetic engineering. tPA is used in the coronary arteries during heart attacks and in the cranial arteries ischemic strokes when there is a low risk of hemorrhage.

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Index

Embolus Retriever with Interlinked Cages (ERIC)
 EmboTrap and EmboTrap II Revascularization Device
 Mechanical embolectomy
 Mechanical thrombectomy
 Merci Retrieval System
 Penumbra System
 RECO Flow Restoration Device
 ReVive SE Thrombectomy Device
 Solitaire FR Revascularization Device
 Stroke
 Trevo Retriever

The use of specific product names is illustrative only. It is not intended to be a recommendation of one product over another, and is not intended to represent a complete listing of all products available.

History

Status	Date	Action
Revised	02/16/2023	Medical Policy & Technology Assessment Committee (MPTAC) review. Removed requirement that a stent retriever device for medically necessary indications. Added medically necessary indications for basilar artery occlusions. Updated Discussion and References sections. Updated Coding section diagnoses to add I63.12.

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New	11/10/2022	MPTAC review. Initial document development. Moved content of SURG.0098 Mechanical Embolectomy for Treatment of Acute Stroke to new clinical utilization management guideline document with a similar title.
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Historical

Federal and State law, as well as contract language including definitions and specific coverage provisions/exclusions, and Medical Policy take precedence over Clinical UM Guidelines and must be considered first in determining eligibility for coverage. The member's contract benefits in effect on the date that services are rendered must be used. Clinical UM Guidelines, which address medical efficacy, should be considered before utilizing medical opinion in adjudication. Medical technology is constantly evolving, and we reserve the right to review and update Clinical UM Guidelines periodically. Clinical UM guidelines are used when the plan performs utilization review for the subject. Due to variances in utilization patterns, each plan may choose whether or not to adopt a particular Clinical UM Guideline. To determine if review is required for this Clinical UM Guideline, please contact the customer service number on the back of the member's card.

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