

(701127)

Medical Benefit		Effective Date: 10/01/14	Next Review Date: 07/18
Preauthorization	No	Review Dates: 07/14, 07/15, 07/16, 07/17	

This protocol considers this test or procedure investigational. If the physician feels this service is medically necessary, preauthorization is recommended.

The following protocol contains medical necessity criteria that apply for this service. The criteria are also applicable to services provided in the local Medicare Advantage operating area for those members, unless separate Medicare Advantage criteria are indicated. If the criteria are not met, reimbursement will be denied and the patient cannot be billed. Please note that payment for covered services is subject to eligibility and the limitations noted in the patient's contract at the time the services are rendered.

Populations	Interventions	Comparators	Outcomes
Individuals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With asthma refractory to standard treatment 	Interventions of interest are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bronchial thermoplasty 	Comparators of interest are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued medical management 	Relevant outcomes include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symptoms • Quality of life • Hospitalizations • Treatment-related morbidity

Description

Bronchial thermoplasty is a potential treatment option for patients with severe persistent asthma. It consists of radiofrequency energy delivered to the distal airways with the aim of decreasing smooth muscle mass believed to be associated with airway inflammation.

Summary of Evidence

For individuals who have asthma refractory to standard treatment who receive bronchial thermoplasty, the evidence includes three randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and meta-analyses of these RCTs. Relevant outcomes are symptoms, quality of life, hospitalizations, and treatment-related morbidity. The AIR2 trial is the largest of the three published RCTs, and the only one double-blinded and sham-controlled, with sites in the United States. Over one year, bronchial thermoplasty was not found to be superior to sham treatment on the investigator-designated primary efficacy outcome of mean change in quality of life score, but was found to be superior on a related outcome, improvement in quality of life of at least 0.5 points on the Asthma Quality of Life Questionnaire. There was a high response rate in the sham group of the AIR2 trial, which suggests a large placebo effect, particularly for subjective outcomes such as quality of life. There are no long-term sham-controlled efficacy data. Findings on adverse events from the three trials have suggested that bronchial thermoplasty is associated with a relatively high rate of adverse events, including hospitalizations during the treatment period, but not in the posttreatment period. Safety data up to five years have been reported in the RCTs for the patients treated with bronchial thermoplasty but not for control patients. Safety data from a U.K. registry study, published in 2016, found that 20% of bronchial thermoplasty procedures were associated with a safety event (i.e., procedural complications, emergency respiratory readmissions, emergency department visits, and/or post-procedure overnight stays). Conclusions cannot be drawn about the effect of bronchial thermoplasty on the net

health outcome due to the limited amount of sham-controlled data (one RCT) on short-term efficacy, the uncertain degree of treatment benefit in that single sham-controlled trial, the lack of long-term sham-controlled data in the face of a high initial placebo response, and the presence of substantial adverse events. In addition, there is a lack of data on patient selection factors for this procedure and, as a result, it is not possible to determine whether there are patient subgroups that might benefit. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

Policy

Bronchial thermoplasty for the treatment of asthma is considered **investigational**.

Background

Asthma, a chronic lung disease, affects approximately 7.6% of adults and 8.4% of children in the United States and, in 2014, accounted for approximately 440,000 hospitalizations and 3650 deaths.¹ Asthma symptoms include episodic shortness of breath that is generally associated with other symptoms such as wheezing, coughing, and chest tightness. Objective clinical features include bronchial hyperresponsiveness, airway inflammation, and reversible airflow obstruction (at least 12% improvement in forced expiratory volume in one second post-bronchodilator, with a minimum of 200 mL improvement). However, there is substantial heterogeneity in the inflammatory features of patients diagnosed with asthma, and this biologic diversity is responsible, at least in part, for the variable response to treatment in the asthma population.

Management of asthma consists of environmental control, patient education, management of comorbidities, and regular follow-up for affected patients, as well as a stepped approach to medication treatment. Guidelines from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute define six pharmacologic steps: step 1 for intermittent asthma and steps 2 through 6 for persistent asthma.² The preferred daily medications: step 1: short-acting β -agonists as needed; step 2: low-dose inhaled corticosteroids (ICS); step 3: ICS and long-acting β -agonists (LABA) or medium-dose ICS; step 4: medium-dose ICS and LABA; step 5: high-dose ICS and LABA; and step 6: high-dose ICS and LABA, and oral corticosteroids.

Despite this multidimensional approach, many patients continue to experience considerable morbidity. In addition to ongoing efforts to optimally implement standard approaches to asthma treatment, new therapies are being developed. One recently developed therapy is bronchial thermoplasty, the controlled delivery of radiofrequency energy to heat tissues in the distal airways. Bronchial thermoplasty is based on the premise that patients with asthma have an increased amount of smooth muscle in the airway and that contraction of this smooth muscle is a major cause of airway constriction. The thermal energy delivered via bronchial thermoplasty aims to reduce the amount of smooth muscle and thereby decrease muscle-mediated bronchoconstriction with the ultimate goal of reducing asthma-related morbidity. Bronchial thermoplasty is intended as a supplemental treatment for patients with severe persistent asthma (i.e., steps five and six in the stepwise approach to care).

Bronchial thermoplasty procedures are performed on an outpatient basis, and each session lasts approximately one hour. During the procedure, a standard flexible bronchoscope is placed through the patient's mouth or nose into the most distal targeted airway and a catheter is inserted into the working channel of the bronchoscope. After placement, the electrode array in the top of the catheter is expanded, and radiofrequency energy is delivered from a proprietary controller and used to heat tissue to 65° C over a five mm area. The positioning of the catheter and application of thermal energy is repeated several times in contiguous areas along the accessible length of the airway. At the end of the treatment session, the catheter and bronchoscope are removed. A course of treatment consists of three separate procedures in different regions of the lung scheduled about three weeks apart.

Regulatory Status

In April 2010, the Alair® Bronchial Thermoplasty System (Asthmatx, Sunnyvale, CA, now part of Boston Scientific) was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration through the premarket approval process for use in adults with severe and persistent asthma whose symptoms are not adequately controlled with low-dose inhaled corticosteroids and long-acting β -agonists. Use of the treatment is contraindicated in patients with implantable devices and those with sensitivities to lidocaine, atropine, or benzodiazepines. It should also not be used while patients are experiencing an asthma exacerbation, active respiratory infection, bleeding disorder, or within two weeks of making changes in their corticosteroid regimen. The same area of the lung should not be treated more than once with bronchial thermoplasty. FDA product code: OOO.

Services that are the subject of a clinical trial do not meet our Technology Assessment Protocol criteria and are considered investigational. *For explanation of experimental and investigational, please refer to the Technology Assessment Protocol.*

It is expected that only appropriate and medically necessary services will be rendered. We reserve the right to conduct prepayment and postpayment reviews to assess the medical appropriateness of the above-referenced procedures. **Some of this protocol may not pertain to the patients you provide care to, as it may relate to products that are not available in your geographic area.**

References

We are not responsible for the continuing viability of web site addresses that may be listed in any references below.

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