Protocol

Gene Expression-Based Assays for Cancers of Unknown Primary

(20454)

Medical Benefit

Effective Date: 04/01/18  
Next Review Date: 07/23

Preauthorization

No  
Review Dates: 05/09, 03/10, 01/11, 01/12, 01/13, 01/14, 01/15, 01/16, 01/17, 01/18, 01/19, 01/20, 01/21, 07/21, 07/22

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.

RELATED PROTOCOL

None

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Populations</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
<th>Comparators</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Individuals:  
• With cancer of unknown primary | Interventions of interest are:  
• Gene expression profiling | Comparators of interest are:  
• Clinical workup, including imaging and pathology, without gene expression profiling | Relevant outcomes include:  
• Overall survival  
• Disease-specific survival  
• Test validity  
• Quality of life |

DESCRIPTION

Cancers of unknown primary represent 3% to 4% of cancers diagnosed in the United States. These cancers are heterogeneous and many accompanied by poor prognoses. A detailed history and physical combined with imaging and tissue pathology can identify some, but not all, primary sources of secondary tumors. It is suggested that identifying the likely primary source with gene expression profiling to direct treatment may improve health outcomes.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

For individuals who have cancers of unknown primary who receive gene expression profiling, the evidence includes studies of clinical validity, and 2 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that have evaluated clinical utility. Relevant outcomes are overall survival, disease-specific survival, test validity, and quality of life. Of the 2 commercially available tests reviewed, 1 has been cleared by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (Tissue of Origin). For these tests, the clinical validity is the ability of a test to determine the site of origin. Using different reference standards (known tumor type, reference diagnosis, a primary tumor identified during follow-up, immunohistochemical analysis) for the tissue of origin, the tests have reported sensitivities or concordances generally high (e.g., 80% to 90% or more). However, the reference standard is imperfect, and evidence for clinical
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Validity does not support potential benefit. Direct evidence of clinical utility is provided by studies that compare health outcomes for patients managed with and without the test. The benefit would be most convincingly demonstrated through a trial randomizing patients with cancers of unknown primary to receive treatment based on gene expression profiling results or usual care. One published RCT and 1 conference presentation with this design were identified. These trials did not find a survival benefit for patients with cancers of unknown primary who received treatment based on the site of origin as determined by molecular testing. A limitation in interpretation of the published trial results is that there were few treatments that were site specific, so there was minimal difference in the actual treatments given to the 2 groups. In the second RCT, most cancers responded to the control treatments. Therefore, the possibility remains that if more site-specific treatments are developed, molecular testing to determine the site of origin in patients with cancers of unknown primary may have clinical utility, but the absence of convincing evidence from RCTs prevents conclusions about clinical utility. The evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

**POLICY**

Gene expression profiling is considered *investigational* to evaluate the site of origin of a tumor of unknown primary, or to distinguish a primary from a metastatic tumor.

**MEDICARE ADVANTAGE**

For Medicare Advantage the following tests will be considered *medically necessary*:

Cancer TYPE ID (Biotheranostics).

Tissue of Origin (Cancer Genetics Incorporated).

Molecular testing, using the ROSETTA Cancer Origin Test™ (PROG), is considered *medically necessary* in the pathologic diagnoses of CUP when a conventional surgical pathology/imaging work-up is unable to identify a primary neoplastic site. Other applications of this technology are considered *investigational* in the use of diagnosis of specific tumor types such as NSCLC and renal cancers.

**BACKGROUND**

**CANCERS OF UNKNOWN PRIMARY**

Cancers of unknown primary, or occult primary malignancies, are tumors that have metastasized from an unknown primary source; they make up about 3% of all cancers in the United States.\(^1\)

Most cancers of unknown primary are adenocarcinomas or undifferentiated tumors; less commonly, they may be squamous carcinomas, melanoma, soft tissue sarcoma, or neuroendocrine tumors. Osteo- and chondrosarcomas rarely produce cancers of unknown primary. The most common primary sites of cancers of unknown primary are lung and pancreas, followed by colon and stomach, then breast, ovary, prostate, and solid-organ carcinomas of the kidney, thyroid, and liver. Conventional methods used to aid in the identification of the origin of a cancer of unknown primary include a thorough history and physical examination; computed tomography scans of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis; routine laboratory studies; and targeted evaluation of specific signs and symptoms.\(^2\)

**Diagnosis and Classification**

Cancers of unknown primary can be classified into 4 categories. Adenocarcinomas compose approximately 70% of cancers of unknown primary. Neuroendocrine tumors compose approximately 1%, squamous cell carcinomas
5%, and poorly differentiated cancer 20% to 25% of cancers of unknown primary.

Biopsy of a cancer of unknown primary with detailed pathology evaluation may include immunohistochemical analysis of the tumor. Immunohistochemical analysis identifies different antigens present in different types of tumors and can usually distinguish an epithelial tumor (i.e., carcinoma) from melanoma or sarcoma. Detailed cytokeratin panels often allow further classification of carcinoma; however, tumors of different origins may show overlapping cytokeratin expression. Results of immunohistochemical analysis may provide a narrow differential of possible sources of a tumor’s origin, but not necessarily a definitive answer.

Treatment Selection and Health Outcomes

Treatment is based on the histologic type and clinical features. About 20% of patients with cancer of unknown primary have features that guide treatment. However, about 80% of patients with cancer of unknown primary have a poor prognosis with a survival of 3 to 6 months despite a variety of chemotherapeutic combinations. Multiple sites of involvement are observed in about 50% of patients, commonly in the lungs, liver, bones and lymph nodes. The premise of tissue of origin testing in cancers of unknown primary is that identifying a likely primary tumor site will inform treatment selection leading to improved survival and other outcomes.

Tests Reviewed in This Report

Selected gene expression profiling tests are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Gene Expression Profiling Tests for Cancers of Unknown Primary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Manufacturer</th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Genes Assayed, n</th>
<th>Tumor Types Assessed, n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tissue of Origin⁴</td>
<td>Cancer Genetics</td>
<td>Oligonucleotide microarray</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CancerTYPE ID</td>
<td>Biotheranostics</td>
<td>RT-qPCR</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RosettaGX Cancer Origin⁵</td>
<td>Rosetta Genomics</td>
<td>RT-qPCR (microRNA)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Agwa et al (2013).³

RT-qPCR: real-time quantitative polymerase chain reaction.
⁴ Formerly PathWork and ResponseDX: Tissue of Origin.
⁵ Formerly miRview met² This test does not appear to be currently available.

REGULATORY STATUS

In 2008, the PathWork® Tissue of Origin Test™ (Response Genetics; now Cancer Genetics, Cancer Genetics merged with StemoniX in 2020.) was cleared for marketing with limitations (see below) by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) through the 510(k) process (FDA product code: OIW), with subsequent clearances for expanded applications in 2010 and minor modifications in 2012. FDA determined that the test was substantially equivalent to existing tests for use in measuring the degree of similarity between the RNA expression pattern in a patient’s fresh-frozen tumor and the RNA expression patterns in a database of tumor samples (poorly differentiated, undifferentiated, metastatic cases) that were diagnosed according to current clinical and histopathologic practice.

Limitations to the clearance were as follows:

- The PathWork® Tissue of Origin Test is not intended to establish the origin of tumors that cannot be diagnosed according to current clinical and pathologic practice (e.g., a cancer of unknown primary).
- It is not intended to subclassify or modify the classification of tumors that can be diagnosed by current clinical and pathologic practice or to predict disease course, or survival or treatment efficacy, or to distinguish primary from metastatic tumor.
• Tumor types not in the PathWork® Tissue of Origin Test database may have RNA expression patterns similar to RNA expression patterns in tumor types in the database, leading to indeterminate results or misclassifications.

Clinical laboratories may develop and validate tests in-house and market them as a laboratory service; laboratory-developed tests must meet the general regulatory standards of the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA). CancerTYPE ID® (Biotheranostics, San Diego, CA) is available under the auspices of the CLIA. Laboratories that offer laboratory-developed tests must be licensed by the CLIA for high-complexity testing. To date, the FDA has chosen not to require any regulatory review of this test.

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


