MEDICAL POLICY – 8.01.62
Electronic Brachytherapy for Nonmelanoma Skin Cancer

BCBSA Ref. Policy: 8.01.62
Effective Date: Sept. 1, 2022
Last Revised: Aug. 22, 2022
Replaces: N/A
RELATED MEDICAL POLICIES:
None

Select a hyperlink below to be directed to that section.

POLICY CRITERIA | CODING | RELATED INFORMATION
EVIDENCE REVIEW | REFERENCES | HISTORY

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Introduction

Brachytherapy is a type of radiation therapy. “Brachy-” means “short,” so brachytherapy is a way of giving radiation that doesn’t travel far through other tissues to reach the cancerous tissue. Electronic brachytherapy is being studied as a treatment for skin cancer other than melanoma. Surgery is usually used to treat nonmelanoma skin cancer. With electronic brachytherapy, a high-dose x-ray is used to deliver radiation directly to the cancerous area. Typically, a mold is made and then placed over the treatment area. A probe — the source of radiation — is inserted into the mold so that the source touches the skin. The radiation is then activated. Once the radiation is delivered, the source is turned off, and the probe and mold are removed. Several sessions are required to complete the treatment. Electronic brachytherapy for nonmelanoma skin cancer is unproven. More studies are needed to see if this treatment is as good as or better than surgery and other types of radiation treatment.

Note: The Introduction section is for your general knowledge and is not to be taken as policy coverage criteria. The rest of the policy uses specific words and concepts familiar to medical professionals. It is intended for providers. A provider can be a person, such as a doctor, nurse, psychologist, or dentist. A provider also can be a place where medical care is given, like a hospital, clinic, or lab. This policy informs them about when a service may be covered.
Policy Coverage Criteria

Treatment | Investigational
---|---
**Electronic brachytherapy (nonmelanoma skin cancer)** | **Electronic brachytherapy for the treatment of nonmelanoma skin cancer (e.g., squamous cell and basal cell carcinoma) is considered investigational.**

Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CPT 0394T</td>
<td>High dose rate electronic brachytherapy, skin surface application, per fraction, includes basic dosimetry, when performed</td>
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Related Information

**Benefit Application**

Electronic brachytherapy for the treatment of breast cancer is a covered diagnosis.

**Evidence Review**

**Description**

Electronic brachytherapy is a form of radiotherapy designed to deliver high-dose rate radiation to treat nonmelanoma skin cancer (NMSC). This technique focuses a uniform dose of x-ray source radiation to the lesion with the aid of a shielded surface application.
Background

Nonmelanoma Skin Cancer

Squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma are the most common types of NMSC in the United States, affecting between 1 million and 3 million people per year\textsuperscript{1,2} respectively, and increasing at a rate of 3% to 8% per year.\textsuperscript{2} Other types (e.g., T-cell lymphoma, Merkel cell tumor, basosquamous carcinoma, Kaposi sarcoma) are much less common. Skin cancer can affect anyone, regardless of skin color; however, the incidence of skin cancer among non-Hispanic White individuals is approximately 30 times higher than that among non-Hispanic Black or Asian/Pacific Islander individuals.\textsuperscript{3} In individuals with darker skin tones, skin cancer is often diagnosed at a later stage when it is more difficult to treat. Additionally, these individuals are prone to skin cancer in areas not commonly exposed to the sun such as the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, the groin, and inside of the mouth.

The primary risk factor for NMSC is sun exposure, with additional risk factors such as toxic exposures, other ionizing radiation exposure, and immunosuppression playing smaller roles.\textsuperscript{2} Although these cancers are rarely fatal, they can impact quality of life, functional status, and physical appearance.

Treatment

In general, the most effective treatment for NMSC is surgical. If surgery is not feasible or preferred, cryosurgery, topical therapy, or radiotherapy can be considered, though the cure rate may be lower.\textsuperscript{4} When considering the most appropriate treatment strategy, recurrence rate, preservation of function, patient expectations, and potential adverse events should be considered.

Surgical

The choice of surgical procedure depends on the histologic type, size and location of the lesion. Patient preferences can also play a factor in surgical decisions due to cosmetic reasons, as well as the consideration of comorbidities and patient risk factors such as anticoagulation. Local excisional procedures, such as electrodesiccation and curettage or cryotherapy, can be used for low-risk lesions, while surgical excision is indicated for lesions that are not low risk. Mohs
surgery is an excisional procedure that uses microscopic guidance to achieve greater precision and sparing of normal tissue. In patients who meet criteria for Mohs surgery, 5-year cure rates for basal cell cancer range from 98% to 99%, making Mohs surgery the preferred procedure for those who qualify.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy is indicated for certain NMSCs not amenable to surgery. In some cases, this is due to the location of the lesion on the eyelid, nose, or other structures that make surgery more difficult and which may be expected to have a less desirable cosmetic outcome. In other cases, surgery may be relatively contraindicated due to clinical factors such as bleeding risk or advanced age. In elderly patients with a relatively large tumor that would require extensive excision, the benefit/risk ratio for radiotherapy may be considered to be favorable. The 5-year control rates for radiotherapy range from 80% to 92%, which is lower than that of surgical excision. A randomized controlled trial by Avril et al (1997) reported that radiotherapy for basal cell carcinoma resulted in greater numbers of persistent and recurrent lesions compared with surgical excision.

When radiotherapy is used for NMSC, the primary modality is external beam radiotherapy. A number of different brachytherapy techniques have also been developed, including low-dose rate systems, iridium-based systems, and high-dose rate systems.

Electronic Brachytherapy

Electronic brachytherapy is a form of radiotherapy delivered locally, using a miniaturized electronic x-ray source rather than a radionuclide-based source. A pliable mold, constructed of silicone or polymethyl-methacrylate, is fitted to the tumor surface. This mold allows treatment to be delivered to nonflat surfaces such as the nose or ear. A radioactive source is then inserted into the mold to deliver a uniform radiation dosage directly to the lesion. Multiple treatment sessions within a short time period (typically within a month) are required.

This technique is feasible for well-circumscribed, superficial tumors because it focuses a uniform dose of x-ray source radiation on the lesion with the aid of a shielded surface application. Advantages of this treatment modality compared with standard radiotherapy include a shorter treatment schedule, avoidance of a surgical procedure and hospital stay, less severe side effects because the focused radiation spares healthy tissue and organs, and the avoidance of radioisotopes.
Summary of Evidence

For individuals who have NMSC who receive electronic brachytherapy, the evidence includes two systematic reviews, a prospective cohort study, and case series. Relevant outcomes are overall survival, disease-specific survival, change in disease status, and treatment-related morbidity. No controlled trials were identified that have compared electronic brachytherapy with alternative treatment options. A 2016 systematic review of case series found local control rates ranging from 83% to 100% and recurrence rates ranging from 0% to 17%. In most studies, the recurrence rate was less than 5%. A 2019 meta-analysis reported brachytherapy cosmesis grades and 5-year local control rates that were comparable to both MMS and conventional excision. Preliminary results from a prospective matched pair cohort study reported no statistically significant difference in outcomes for the use of electronic brachytherapy compared to MMS in NMSC, but confidence in these findings is low due to study design and conduct limitations. In the absence of randomized controlled studies, conclusions cannot be drawn about the efficacy and safety of electronic brachytherapy compared with other treatments for NMSC. Controlled trials are needed in defined populations that compare electronic brachytherapy with alternatives, specifically other forms of radiotherapy or surgical approaches. The evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

Ongoing and Unpublished Clinical Trials

Some currently ongoing and unpublished trials that might influence this policy are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Key Ongoing Trials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCT No.</th>
<th>Trial Name</th>
<th>Planned Enrollment</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCT02131805</td>
<td>A Multicenter Pilot Study of Electronic Skin Surface Brachytherapy for Cutaneous Basal Cell and Squamous Cell Carcinoma</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>May 2023</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unpublished</td>
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Practice Guidelines and Position Statements

Guidelines or position statements will be considered for inclusion if they were issued by, or jointly by, a U.S. professional society, an international society with U.S. representation, or National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Priority will be given to guidelines that are informed by a systematic review, include strength of evidence ratings, and include a description of management of conflict of interest.

American Academy of Dermatology

In 2018, the American Academy of Dermatology published guidelines on the management of basal cell carcinoma and the management of squamous cell carcinoma. Electronic brachytherapy was rated as a C recommendation, with the level of evidence of II and III. By comparison, surgery, cryosurgery, topical therapies, and photodynamic therapies are rated as A and B recommendations.

American Brachytherapy Society

The American Brachytherapy Society issued a consensus statement on electronic brachytherapy following a literature review focused on trials, prospective studies, multi-institutional series, and single institution reports addressing clinical outcomes and toxicities. Due to a lack of comparative data to traditional treatments and limited long-term follow-up, prospective studies with a larger number of patients undergoing electronic brachytherapy for nonmelanoma skin cancer are recommended. At this time, the statement recommends that treatment with
American Society for Radiation Oncology

The American Society for Radiation Oncology (ASTRO) issued clinical practice guidelines regarding definitive and postoperative radiation therapy for basal and squamous cell cancers of the skin. Key questions were addressed by a systematic literature review and recommendations were developed via consensus with a modified Delphi approach. Consensus recommendations for specific dose-fractionation schemes are detailed for the definitive and post-operative settings. The guideline also states that appropriate use of any of the four major radiation modalities, including electronically-generated low energy sources such as electronic brachytherapy, result in similar local control and cosmetic outcomes. Therefore, “the decision of which modality and fractionation scheme to use should be based on both tumor characteristics (e.g., shape, contour, depth, and location) and normal tissue considerations.”

National Comprehensive Cancer Network

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network guidelines on basal cell carcinoma (v.2.2022) and squamous cell skin cancer (v.2.2022) both contain the following statement on brachytherapy: “There is insufficient long-term efficacy and safety data to support the routine use of radioisotope or electronic surface brachytherapy.”

Medicare National Coverage

There is no national coverage determination.

Regulatory Status

Electronic brachytherapy systems for the treatment of NMSCs are designed to deliver high-dose rate brachytherapy to treat skin surface lesions. This technique focuses a uniform dose of x-ray source radiation to the lesion with the aid of a shielded surface application. The Superficial X-Ray Radiation Therapy SRT-100 Vision™ System (Sensus Healthcare), Esteya® Electronic Brachytherapy System (Nucletron BV) and the Xoft® Axxent® Electronic Brachytherapy System
(iCAD) are systems that have been cleared for marketing by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) through the 510(k) process.

FDA product code: JAD.

References


## History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>07/14/15</td>
<td>New Policy. Policy created with literature review through April 30, 2015. Electronic brachytherapy is considered investigational for the treatment of nonmelanoma skin cancer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>01/20/16</td>
<td>Coding update. New CPT codes 0394T-0395T, effective 1/1/16, added to policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>03/01/19</td>
<td>Coding update, removed CPT code 0395T.</td>
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