ACUPUNCTURE

Description: The term "acupuncture" describes a family of procedures involving the stimulation of anatomical points on the body using a variety of techniques. Acupuncture methods have been used to relieve pain, to induce anesthesia, to alleviate the symptoms of substance withdrawal, or to treat various non-painful disorders.

The acupuncture technique that has been most often studied scientifically involves penetrating the skin at specific points throughout the body with thin, solid, metallic needles that are manipulated by hand or by electrical stimulation. In this type of acupuncture, known as whole-body acupuncture, the placement of needles into the skin is dictated by the location of meridians. These meridians are thought to mark patterns of energy flow throughout the human body. Whole-body acupuncture has four components:

- The acupuncture needle(s);
- The target location defined by traditional Chinese medicine;
- The depth of insertion; and
- The stimulation of the inserted needle

Auricular acupuncture, a variant of traditional whole-body acupuncture, is based on the theory that all acupuncture points are located on the external part of the ear. Proponents of this approach believe that over 200 acupuncture points are located on the ear and that each treated point triggers electrical impulses from the ear to the brain and then to the specific body part being treated.

Policy:

I. Whole-body Acupuncture
   A. The use of whole-body acupuncture, with or without electrical stimulation, may be considered MEDICALLY NECESSARY for the following indications:
      1. Treatment of chronic pain (defined as duration of at least six months) when the following criteria have been met, prior to the beginning of acupuncture treatment:
a. A comprehensive history and physical evaluation of the patient has been completed to document etiology of the pain AND

b. Conservative forms of multidisciplinary therapy (for example, pharmacologic therapy, physical therapy, psychotherapy) have been tried and have failed to alleviate the pain.

2. Prevention and treatment of nausea associated with surgery, chemotherapy, or pregnancy.

B. The use of whole-body acupuncture for any other indications, including but not limited to, substance-related and behavioral health disorders, is considered INVESTIGATIVE due to a lack of scientific evidence supporting its impact on improved health outcomes.

II. The use of all other types of acupuncture, (e.g., auricular acupuncture), for any indication, including but not limited to, all substance-related and behavioral health disorders, is considered INVESTIGATIVE due to a lack of scientific evidence supporting a significant impact on improved health outcomes.

Coverage: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota medical policies apply generally to all Blue Cross and Blue Plus plans and products. Benefit plans vary in coverage and some plans may not provide coverage for certain services addressed in the medical policies.

Medicaid products and some self-insured plans may have additional policies and prior authorization requirements. Receipt of benefits is subject to all terms and conditions of the member’s summary plan description (SPD). As applicable, review the provisions relating to a specific coverage determination, including exclusions and limitations. Blue Cross reserves the right to revise, update and/or add to its medical policies at any time without notice.

For Medicare NCD and/or Medicare LCD, please consult CMS or National Government Services websites.

Refer to the Pre-Certification/Pre-Authorization section of the Medical Behavioral Health Policy Manual for the full list of services, procedures, prescription drugs, and medical devices that require Pre-certification/Pre-Authorization. Note that services with specific coverage criteria may be reviewed retrospectively to determine if criteria are being met. Retrospective denial of claims may result if criteria are not met.

Coding: The following codes are included below for informational purposes only, and are subject to change without notice. Inclusion or exclusion of a code does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement.
CPT:
97810 Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; without electrical stimulation, initial 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient
97811 Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; without electrical stimulation, each additional 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient, with re-insertion of needle(s) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
97813 Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; with electrical stimulation, initial 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient
97814 Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; with electrical stimulation, each additional 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient, with re-insertion of needle(s) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

HCPCS:
S8930 Electrical stimulation of auricular acupuncture points; each 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient

Policy History:
Developed July 30, 1985

Most recent history:
Reviewed September 14, 2011
Reviewed September 12, 2012
Reviewed/Updated, no policy statement changes September 11, 2013
Reviewed June 11, 2014

Cross Reference:
Low-Level Laser Therapy and Deep Tissue Laser Therapy, II-09
Tobacco Cessation Treatments, X-21

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