The following Protocol contains medical necessity criteria that apply for this service. It is applicable to Medicare Advantage products unless separate Medicare Advantage criteria are indicated. If the criteria are not met, reimbursement will be denied and the patient cannot be billed. Preauthorization is not required but recommended if, despite this Protocol position, you feel this service is medically necessary. 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.

Description

Hippotherapy, also referred to as equine movement therapy, describes physical therapy using a horse. Hippotherapy has been proposed as a type of physical therapy for patients with impaired walking or balance.

Background

Patients with spastic cerebral palsy frequently have impaired walking ability due to hyperactive tendon reflexes, muscle hypertonias, and increased resistance to increasing velocity of muscle stretch. These abnormalities result in a lack of selective muscle control and poor equilibrium responses. Hippotherapy has been proposed as a technique to decrease the energy requirements and improve walking in patients with cerebral palsy. It is thought that the natural swaying motion of the horse induces a pelvic movement in the rider that simulates human ambulation. In addition, variations in the horse’s movements can also prompt natural equilibrium movements in the rider. Hippotherapy is also being evaluated in patients with multiple sclerosis and developmental disorders such as Down syndrome.

Hippotherapy is a therapeutic intervention that is typically conducted by a physical or occupational therapist and is aimed at improving impaired body function. Therapeutic horseback riding is typically conducted by riding instructors and is more frequently intended as social therapy. It is hoped that the multisensory environment may be beneficial to children with profound social and communication deficits, such as autism spectrum disorder and schizophrenia. When considered together, hippotherapy and therapeutic riding are described as equine-assisted activities and therapies. This Protocol addresses equine-assisted activities that focus on improving physical functions such as balance and gait.

Simulated hippotherapy using a new device has been studied in European centers. Therapeutic interventions using such a device would be conducted in the physical/occupational therapy setting and are outside the scope of this Protocol.

Policy (Formerly Corporate Medical Guideline)

Hippotherapy is considered investigational.

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.


