BlueCross BlueShield Federal Employee Program.

FEP Medical Policy Manual

FEP 2.01.105 Dry Hydrotherapy for Chronic Pain Conditions

Annual Effective Policy Date: April 1, 2025

Original Policy Date: September 2022

Related Policies:

1.01.09 - Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation
2.01.100 - Dry Needling of Trigger Points for Myofascial Pain
8.01.40 - Manipulation Under Anesthesia

Dry Hydrotherapy for Chronic Pain Conditions

Description

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Dry hydrotherapy, also known as hydromassage or aquamassage, is a massage treatment modality that circulates heated, pressurized water in a self-contained device such as a bed or chair. The individual remains clothed and dry as they sit or lie on top of a waterproof barrier containing rotating and pulsating interior jets. Purported benefits of dry hydrotherapy include alleviation of pain, increased blood circulation, improved range of motion, and decreased need for other interventions.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this evidence review is to determine whether the use of dry hydrotherapy improves the net health outcome in individuals with chronic pain conditions.

POLICY STATEMENT

The use of dry hydrotherapy massagers for the treatment of chronic pain conditions is considered **investigational**.

The policies contained in the FEP Medical Policy Manual are developed to assist in administering contractual benefits and do not constitute medical advice. They are not intended to replace or substitute for the independent medical judgment of a practitioner or other health care professional in the treatment of an individual member. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association does not intend by the FEP Medical Policy Manual, or by any particular medical policy, to recommend, advocate, encourage or discourage any particular medical technologies. Medical decisions relative to medical technologies are to be made strictly by members/patients in consultation with their health care providers. The conclusion that a particular service or supply is medically necessary does not constitute a representation or warranty that the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Service Benefit Plan covers (or pays for) this service or supply for a particular member.

POLICY GUIDELINES

None

BENEFIT APPLICATION

Experimental or investigational procedures, treatments, drugs, or devices are not covered (See General Exclusion Section of brochure).

Dry hydrotherapy may be offered as part of a comprehensive program in pain management as offered by pain management, chiropractic, or physical therapy centers.

FDA REGULATORY STATUS

Dry hydrotherapy devices are classified by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as class I therapeutic massagers, which are defined as electrically powered devices intended for medical purposes, such as to relieve minor muscle aches and pains. Class I devices are exempt from 510(k) requirements and do not require submission of clinical data regarding efficacy but only notification of FDA prior to marketing (FDA Product Code: ISA; Sec. 890.5660).

Dry hydrotherapy does not involve water immersion and should not be confused with immersion hydromassage baths or powered sitz baths (FDA Product Code: ILJ; Sec. 890.5100).

Examples of currently marketed dry hydrotherapy devices include but may not be limited to HydroMassage branded (previously AquaMED) beds and loungers (JTL Enterprises Inc.), Pro S10 or ComfortWave S10 branded hydromassage tables (Sidmar Manufacturing Inc.), and SolaJet Dry-Hydrotherapy Systems.

RATIONALE

Summary of Evidence

For individuals with chronic pain conditions (eg, musculoskeletal, neuropathic, and mixed pain conditions) who receive dry hydrotherapy, there are no published, peer-reviewed studies. Relevant outcomes are symptoms, functional outcomes, quality of life, medication use, and resource utilization. A health technology assessment released in 1998 for the AquaMED device also failed to identify published research to support claims that dry hydrotherapy can take the place of multiple modalities or that it provides any durable health benefits. The evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Practice Guidelines and Position Statements

Guidelines or position statements will be considered for inclusion in 'Supplemental Information' if they were issued by, or jointly by, a US professional society, an international society with US 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.

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National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

In 2017, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published a guidance on the diagnosis and management of spondyloarthritis in individuals over 16 years of age.[5,] The guidance recommends consideration of hydrotherapy as an adjunctive therapy to manage pain or improve function for individuals with axial spondyloarthritis. However, it is unclear whether this recommendation applies to the use of dry hydrotherapy.

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendations

Not applicable.

Medicare National Coverage

There is no national coverage determination. In the absence of a national coverage determination, coverage decisions are left to the discretion of local Medicare carriers.

REFERENCES

1. Sidmar. Healthcare Data. 2023; https://sidmar.com/healthcare/healthcare-data/. Accessed October 28, 2024.
2. Washington State Department of Labor & Industries. AquaMED Technology Assessment. 1998; https://www.lni.wa.gov/patient-care/treating-patients/treatment-guidelines-and-resources/_docs/AquaMedTA.pdf. Accessed October 28, 2024.
3. Chiropractic Economics. AquaMED and HydroMassage announce brand integration. January 28, 2009; https://www.chiroeco.com/aquamed-and-hydromassage-announce-brand-integration/. Accessed October 28, 2024.
4. HydroMassage. HydroMassage Benefits: Ways Water Massage Can Improve Wellness & Recovery. January 20, 2022; https://www.hydromassage.com/blog/hydromassage-benefits-for-wellness-recovery/. Accessed October 28, 2024.
5. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). NICE guideline [NG65]. Spondyloarthritis in over 16s: diagnosis and management. February 28, 2017; https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng65. Accessed October 28, 2024.

POLICY HISTORY - THIS POLICY WAS APPROVED BY THE FEP® PHARMACY AND MEDICAL POLICY COMMITTEE ACCORDING TO THE HISTORY BELOW:

Date	Action	Description
September 2022	New policy - Add to Pain Management section	Policy created with literature review through May 20, 2022; references added. The use of dry hydrotherapy massagers for the treatment of individuals with chronic pain conditions is considered investigational.
December 2024	Replace policy	Policy updated with literature review through September 13, 2023; no references added. Policy statements unchanged.
March 2025	Replace policy	Policy updated with literature review through October 28, 2024; no references added. Policy statements unchanged.

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