

Humana Decision to Deny PET/CT Coverage

On November 6, SNMMI received information on the recent decision by Humana Inc. (Louisville, KY) (Policy Number: HCS-0506-010) to deny coverage for PET/CT (CPT codes 78429–78433) on the basis that it is “experimental/investigational” and “not identified as widely used and generally accepted for the proposed uses as reported in nationally recognized peer-reviewed medical literature.” The revised policy, to take effect February 4, 2021, indicated that Humana members may NOT be eligible under the Plan for PET with concurrently acquired CT for (but not limited to):

- Cardiac indications; OR
- Gastric or esophageal oncologic indications; OR
- Neurologic indications; OR
- Total body PET/CT (uEXPLORER) for screening (e.g., cancer).

SNMMI joined several other medical societies, including the American Society of Nuclear Cardiology (ASNC), in questioning and opposing this decision. In 2016, ASNC imaging guidelines/SNMMI procedure standards (1) detailed the quality components required to perform PET nuclear cardiology procedures. In 2020, a multidisciplinary appropriate use criteria document (2) published by SNMMI stated: “The high spatial and contrast resolution in concert with photon attenuation-free images of PET have led to high image quality associated with the highest sensitivity and specificity of PET/CT perfusion imaging in the detection and characterization of coronary artery disease (CAD)” (3–6). Publication of these peer-reviewed documents validated the role of cardiac PET/CT and led to reimbursement by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), as well as other payers, for these procedures with Category I codes.

In a response protesting the Humana decision, SNMMI noted also that PET/CT with ¹⁸F-FDG has an established role in evaluating esophageal cancers and cancers of the gastro-esophageal junction, as affirmed by national CMS coverage policies. In addition, several neurologic indications benefit from and are appropriate for PET/CT. Although screening low-risk patients for cancer with PET is not routine, the appropriateness of evaluating high-risk patients for cancer is defined by the clinical context and question.

Almost all commercially available PET scanners are now hybrid PET/CT systems, and these newer systems have numerous other improvements over older models. With this policy, Humana would require its members to provide PET services using less advanced instrumentation than is currently available. Hybrid PET/CT systems also reduce scan time and patient motion, leading to higher quality images. CT attenuation correction can also be customized for body habitus, further improving image quality. For cardiac PET, extensive published literature documents the additional diagnostic value contributed by review of the CT

attenuation map image. SNMMI concluded its protest by noting that “Implementing this revised policy will deny patients access to state-of-the-art imaging procedures that are the standard of care for making potentially life-saving clinical decisions.”

At the same time that SNMMI responded to the Humana decision, ASNC sent the company a letter concurring with the objections raised and expressing similar concerns about Humana’s noncoverage decision for SPECT/CT (CPT codes 78830 and 78832). The revised policy states that “Humana members may NOT be eligible under the Plan for the following for any indications:

- CAD used in conjunction with MRI for prostate biopsy (e.g., DynaCAD); OR
- CAD used in conjunction with ultrasound for prostate biopsy (e.g., Fusion Bx 2.0); OR
- Diagnostic CT scan used in conjunction with PET/CT; OR
- MRI/CT; OR
- PET/MRI; OR
- SeeFactorCT3; OR
- SPECT/CT; OR
- SPECT/MRI.”

On November 13, Johannes Czernin, MD, from the University of California at Los Angeles, and Andrei Iagaru, MD, from Stanford University (CA) published a strongly worded editorial ahead of print in *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine* referring to the decision as an “injustice” (7). SNMMI’s letter to Humana is available at http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-snmimi/files/production/public/Humana_PET-CT_Letter_final%2011-13-20.pdf. The ASNC letter is available at https://www.asnc.org/files/ASNC_Letter_to_Humana_10_29_20.pdf.

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