INPATIENT HOSPITAL STAYS FOR TREATMENT OF ALCOHOLISM (NCD 130.1)

Guideline Number: MPG160.04

Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms and Conditions</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TERMS AND CONDITIONS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSE</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICY SUMMARY</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUIDELINE HISTORY/REVISION INFORMATION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Related Medicare Advantage Policy Guidelines

- Chemical Aversion Therapy for Treatment of Alcoholism (NCD 130.3)
- Electrical Aversion Therapy for Treatment of Alcoholism (NCD 130.4)
- Outpatient Hospital Services for Treatment of Alcoholism (NCD 130.2)
- Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse (NCD 210.8)
- Treatment of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse in a Freestanding Clinic (NCD 130.5)
- Treatment of Drug Abuse (Chemical Dependency) (NCD 130.6)
- Withdrawal Treatments for Narcotic Addictions (NCD 130.7)

Related Medicare Advantage Coverage Summary

- Alcohol, Chemical and/or Substance Abuse Detoxification and Rehabilitation

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Medicare Advantage Policy Guidelines are applicable to UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage Plans offered by UnitedHealthcare and its affiliates.

These Policy Guidelines are provided for informational purposes, and do not constitute medical advice. Treating physicians and healthcare providers are solely responsible for determining what care to provide to their patients. Members should always consult their physician before making any decisions about medical care.

Benefit coverage for health services is determined by the member specific benefit plan document* and applicable laws that may require coverage for a specific service. The member specific benefit plan document identifies which services are covered, which are excluded, and which are subject to limitations. In the event of a conflict, the member specific benefit plan document supersedes the Medicare Advantage Policy Guidelines.

Medicare Advantage Policy Guidelines are developed as needed, are regularly reviewed and updated, and are subject to change. They represent a portion of the resources used to support UnitedHealthcare coverage decision making. UnitedHealthcare may modify these Policy Guidelines at any time by publishing a new version of the policy on this website. Medicare source materials used to develop these guidelines include, but are not limited to, CMS National Coverage Determinations (NCDs), Local Coverage Determinations (LCDs), Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Medicare Claims Processing Manual, Medicare Program Integrity Manual, Medicare Managed Care Manual, etc. The information presented in the Medicare Advantage Policy Guidelines is believed to be accurate and current as of the date of publication, and is provided on an "AS IS" basis. Where there is a conflict between this document and Medicare source materials, the Medicare source materials will apply.

You are responsible for submission of accurate claims. Medicare Advantage Policy Guidelines are intended to ensure that coverage decisions are made accurately based on the code or codes that correctly describe the health care services provided. UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage Policy Guidelines use Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), or other coding guidelines. References to CPT® or other sources are for definitional purposes only and do not imply any right to reimbursement or guarantee claims payment.
Medicare Advantage Policy Guidelines are the property of UnitedHealthcare. Unauthorized copying, use and distribution of this information are strictly prohibited.

*For more information on a specific member’s benefit coverage, please call the customer service number on the back of the member ID card or refer to the Administrative Guide. **CPT® is a registered trademark of the American Medical Association.

**PURPOSE**

The Medicare Advantage Policy Guideline documents are generally used to support UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage claims processing activities and facilitate providers’ submission of accurate claims for the specified services. The document can be used as a guide to help determine applicable:

- Medicare coding or billing requirements, and/or
- Medical necessity coverage guidelines; including documentation requirements.

UnitedHealthcare follows Medicare guidelines such as LCDs, NCDs, and other Medicare manuals for the purposes of determining coverage. It is expected providers retain or have access to appropriate documentation when requested to support coverage. Please utilize the links in the References section below to view the Medicare source materials used to develop this resource document. This document is not a replacement for the Medicare source materials that outline Medicare coverage requirements. Where there is a conflict between this document and Medicare source materials, the Medicare source materials will apply.

**POLICY SUMMARY**

**Overview**

**Inpatient Hospital Stay for Alcohol Detoxification**

Many hospitals provide detoxification services during the more acute stages of alcoholism or alcohol withdrawal. When the high probability or occurrence of medical complications (e.g., delirium, confusion, trauma, or unconsciousness) during detoxification for acute alcoholism or alcohol withdrawal necessitates the constant availability of physicians and/or complex medical equipment found only in the hospital setting, inpatient hospital care during this period is considered reasonable and necessary and is therefore covered under the program.

**Inpatient Hospital Stay for Alcohol Rehabilitation**

Hospitals may also provide structured inpatient alcohol rehabilitation programs to the chronic alcoholic. These programs are composed primarily of coordinated educational and psychotherapeutic services provided on a group basis. Depending on the subject matter, a series of lectures, discussions, films, and group therapy sessions are led by either physicians, psychologists, or alcoholism counselors from the hospital or various outside organizations. In addition, individual psychotherapy and family counseling (see §70.1 of the NCD Manual) may be provided in selected cases. These programs are conducted under the supervision and direction of a physician. Patients may directly enter an inpatient hospital rehabilitation program after having undergone detoxification in the same hospital or in another hospital or may enter an inpatient hospital rehabilitation program without prior hospitalization for detoxification.

**Combined Alcohol Detoxification/Rehabilitation Programs**

Contractors should apply the guidelines above to both phases of a combined inpatient hospital alcohol detoxification/rehabilitation program. Not all patients who require the inpatient hospital setting for detoxification also need the inpatient hospital setting for rehabilitation. (See §130.1 of the NCD Manual for coverage of outpatient hospital alcohol rehabilitation services.) Where the inpatient hospital setting is medically necessary for both alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation, generally a 3-week period is reasonable and necessary to bring the patient to the point where care can be continued in other than an inpatient hospital setting.

**Guidelines**

**Inpatient Hospital Stay for Alcohol Detoxification**

Generally, detoxification can be accomplished within 2-3 days with an occasional need for up to 5 days where the patient’s condition dictates. This limit (5 days) may be extended in an individual case where there is a need for a longer period for detoxification for a particular patient. In such cases, however, there should be documentation by a physician which substantiates that a longer period of detoxification was reasonable and necessary. When the detoxification needs of an individual no longer require an inpatient hospital setting, coverage should be denied on the basis that inpatient hospital care is not reasonable and necessary as required by section 1862(a)(1) of the Act. Following detoxification a patient may be transferred to an inpatient rehabilitation unit or discharged to a residential treatment program or outpatient treatment setting.

**Inpatient Hospital Stay for Alcohol Rehabilitation**

Alcohol rehabilitation can be provided in a variety of settings other than the hospital setting. In order for an inpatient hospital stay for alcohol rehabilitation to be covered under Medicare it must be medically necessary for the care to be...
provided in the inpatient hospital setting rather than in a less costly facility or on an outpatient basis. Inpatient hospital care for receipt of an alcohol rehabilitation program would generally be medically necessary where either (1) there is documentation by the physician that recent alcohol rehabilitation services in a less intensive setting or on an outpatient basis have proven unsuccessful and, as a consequence, the patient requires the supervision and intensity of services which can only be found in the controlled environment of the hospital, or (2) only the hospital environment can assure the medical management or control of the patient’s concomitant conditions during the course of alcohol rehabilitation. (However, a patient’s concomitant condition may make the use of certain alcohol treatment modalities medically inappropriate.) In addition, the "active treatment" criteria (see the Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 2, "Inpatient Psychiatric Hospital Services," §20) should be applied to psychiatric care in the general hospital as well as to psychiatric care in a psychiatric hospital. Since alcoholism is classifiable as a psychiatric condition the "active treatment" criteria must also be met in order for alcohol rehabilitation services to be covered under Medicare. (Thus, it is the combined need for "active treatment" and for covered care which can only be provided in the inpatient hospital setting, rather than the fact that rehabilitation immediately follows a period of detoxification, which provides the basis for coverage of inpatient hospital alcohol rehabilitation programs.)

Generally 16-19 days of rehabilitation services are sufficient to bring a patient to a point where care could be continued in other than an inpatient hospital setting. An inpatient hospital stay for alcohol rehabilitation may be extended beyond this limit in an individual case where a longer period of alcohol rehabilitation is medically necessary. In such cases, however, there should be documentation by a physician which substantiates the need for such care. Where the rehabilitation needs of an individual no longer require an inpatient hospital setting, coverage should be denied on the basis that inpatient hospital care is not reasonable and necessary as required by section 1862(a)(1) of the Act.

Subsequent admissions to the inpatient hospital setting for alcohol rehabilitation follow up, reinforcement, or "recap" treatments are considered to be readmissions (rather than an extension of the original stay) and must meet the requirements of this section for coverage under Medicare. Prior admissions to the inpatient hospital setting either in the same hospital or in a different hospital may be an indication that the "active treatment" requirements are not met (i.e., there is no reasonable expectation of improvement) and the stay should not be covered. Accordingly, there should be documentation to establish that "readmission" to the hospital setting for alcohol rehabilitation services can reasonably be expected to result in improvement of the patient's condition. For example, the documentation should indicate what changes in the patient's medical condition, social or emotional status, or treatment plan make improvement likely, or why the patient's initial hospital treatment was not sufficient.

**Combined Alcohol Detoxification/Rehabilitation Programs**

Decisions regarding reasonableness and necessity of treatment, the need for an inpatient hospital level of care, and length of treatment should be made based on accepted medical practice with the advice of their medical consultant. (In hospitals under PSRO review, PSRO determinations of medical necessity of services and appropriateness of the level of care at which services are provided are binding on the title XVIII fiscal intermediaries for purposes of adjudicating claims for payment.)

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**REFERENCES**

**CMS National Coverage Determinations (NCDs)**
- NCD 130.1 Inpatient Hospital Stays for Treatment of Alcoholism

**CMS Benefit Policy Manual**
- Chapter 2 Inpatient Psychiatric Hospital Services
- Chapter 3; § 30 Inpatient Days Counting Toward Benefit Maximums
- Chapter 4 Inpatient Psychiatric Benefit Days Reduction and Lifetime Limitation
- Chapter 16; § 20 Services Not Reasonable and Necessary

**MLN Matters**
- Article SE1604, Medicare Coverage of Substance Abuse Services

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**GUIDELINE HISTORY/REVISION INFORMATION**

Revisions to this summary document do not in any way modify the requirement that services be provided and documented in accordance with the Medicare guidelines in effect on the date of service in question.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action/Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/10/2018</td>
<td>- Annual review; no changes</td>
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</tbody>
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