

Minimally Invasive Procedures for Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) and Achalasia (for Ohio Only)

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[➔ Instructions for Use](#)

Table of Contents	Page
Application	1
Coverage Rationale	1
Definitions	2
Applicable Codes	2
Description of Services	2
Clinical Evidence	4
U.S. Food and Drug Administration	17
References	18
Policy History/Revision Information	22
Instructions for Use	23

Related Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bariatric Surgery (for Ohio Only)

Application

This Medical Policy only applies to, the state of Ohio. Any requests for services that are stated as unproven or services for which there is a coverage or quantity limit will be evaluated for medical necessity using Ohio Administrative Code 5160-1-01.

Coverage Rationale

Note: This policy only applies to individuals 18 years of age and older. For individuals under 18 years of age, medical necessity will be evaluated for medical necessity using the Ohio Administrative Code 5160-1-01.

The per oral endoscopic myotomy (POEM) procedure is proven and medically necessary for [Achalasia](#) or [Diffuse Esophageal Spasm](#).

Per oral endoscopic myotomy (POEM) is considered unproven and not medically necessary for all other indications (e.g., Zenker’s diverticula) due to insufficient evidence.

The following are unproven and not medically necessary for treating [Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease](#) (GERD) due to insufficient evidence of efficacy:

- [Endoscopic therapies](#) other than Transoral Incisionless Fundoplication
- [Injection or implantation techniques](#)
- [LINX Reflux Management System](#)

For medical necessity clinical coverage criteria for other minimally invasive procedures for GERD and achalasia, refer to the InterQual® CP: Procedures, Antireflux Surgery or Hiatal Hernia Repair.

Click [here](#) to view the InterQual® criteria.

Endoluminal therapy with GERDx™ is investigational, unproven and not medically necessary for treating GERD as it has not received U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval.

Refer to the Medical Policy titled [Bariatric Surgery \(for Ohio Only\)](#) for information regarding endoscopic therapies for the treatment of obesity.

Definitions

Achalasia: A primary esophageal motor disorder of unknown etiology characterized by degeneration of the myenteric plexus, which results in impaired relaxation of the esophagogastric junction (EGJ), along with the loss of organized peristalsis in the esophageal body (American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy [ASGE]).

Diffuse Esophageal Spasm: A condition characterized by uncoordinated contractions of the esophagus that typically results in chest pain and/or dysphagia (Cameron, 2020).

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease: A condition where the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) relaxes too often or weakens which allows stomach acid to flow backward (or reflux) into the esophagus (American College of Gastroenterology [ACG]).

Applicable Codes

The following list(s) of procedure and/or diagnosis codes is provided for reference purposes only and may not be all inclusive. Listing of a code in this policy does not imply that the service described by the code is a covered or non-covered health service. Benefit coverage for health services is determined by federal, state, or contractual requirements and applicable laws that may require coverage for a specific service. The inclusion of a code does not imply any right to reimbursement or guarantee claim payment. Other Policies and Guidelines may apply.

CPT Code	Description
43210	Esophagogastroduodenoscopy, flexible, transoral; with esophagogastric fundoplasty, partial or complete, includes duodenoscopy when performed
43257	Esophagogastroduodenoscopy, flexible, transoral; with delivery of thermal energy to the muscle of lower esophageal sphincter and/or gastric cardia, for treatment of gastroesophageal reflux disease
43284	Laparoscopy, surgical, esophageal sphincter augmentation procedure, placement of sphincter augmentation device (i.e., magnetic band), including cruroplasty when performed
43289	Unlisted laparoscopy procedure, esophagus
43499	Unlisted procedure, esophagus
43999	Unlisted procedure, stomach

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Description of Services

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a condition that is characterized by either a weak or dysfunctional lower esophageal sphincter (LES) that results in partially digested food from the stomach to flow back into the esophagus, a process known as reflux. Persistent GERD may lead to esophageal damage or other serious conditions, such as severe esophagitis, strictures, Barrett's metaplasia, and adenocarcinoma of the esophagus.

Initial treatment of GERD usually involves over the counter (OTC) antacids, OTC histamine-2-receptor antagonists (H₂RAs; also called H₂ blockers), and proton pump inhibitors (PPI). Daily use of proton pump inhibitors (PPI) is generally effective in the treatment of most patients with GERD; however, up to 40% have persisting symptoms (Weitzendorfer et al., 2018). For individuals who wish to discontinue use of these medications due to concern of long-term side effects, or for individuals whose GERD is refractory to pharmacologic treatment, an open or laparoscopic Nissen fundoplication may be considered. However, some individuals may not be suitable candidates given the invasiveness and risks associated with surgery. As a result, minimally invasive procedures, including endoscopic or endoluminal therapies and laparoscopic approaches, have been

proposed as alternative treatment methods to improve the function of the LES, with the objective of eliminating symptoms, healing esophagitis, preventing recurrence of symptoms or progression of disease, and reducing the need for lifelong pharmacologic therapy.

Minimally invasive approaches proposed in the treatment of GERD, include the following:

- Radiofrequency energy: The Stretta procedure administers radiofrequency (RF) energy via endoscopic needles placed in the tissues surrounding the lower esophageal sphincter. The RF energy heats this neighboring tissue, creating thermal lesions. Submucosal scarring forms as the lesions heal, causing shrinkage and tightening around the LES. The mechanism of action is believed to be related to decreased sensitivity to acid, decreased compliance of the LES, or increased pressure of the LES (Stephanidis et al., 2017).
- Endoscopic plication or suturing:
 - The NDO Endoscopic Plication System, also known as the NDO Plicator System, places a full-thickness transmural plication near the gastroesophageal junction under direct endoscopic visualization.
 - EsophyX is an endoluminal therapeutic option that uses a trans-oral and fastener deploying device. It is inserted orally within a thin, flexible tube and deployed inside the stomach to create a full thickness plication of the stomach fundus at the GE junction, thereby resembling an endoscopic fundoplication. The current TIF 2.0 technique (the initial TIF 1.0 technique is no longer recommended) generates a physiological valve via fasteners placed on the far posterior and anterior sides of the lesser curvature, with additional fasteners placed 1–3 cm proximal to the GE junction (Stephanidis et al., 2017).
 - GERDx™ (G-SURG) is an endoscopic full-thickness plication device that uses hydraulic elements for controlling.
 - The Medigus Ultrasonic Surgical Endostapler (MUSE™ system, Medigus) is an endoscopic stapling device for transoral partial fundoplication. According to the manufacturer’s website, as the MUSE system contains the surgical stapler, microvisual, and ultrasonic capabilities, it allows a single physician to complete the procedure.
- Injection or implantation techniques include the following:
 - The Plexiglas® (polymethylmethacrylate [PMMA]) procedure involves injection of an inert polymer material into the submucosa of the proximal LES zone to provide bulking support to the sphincter and decrease transient relaxation of the lower esophageal sphincter (tLESRs).
 - Another bulking agent, pyrolytic carbon-coated beads (Durasphere®), is being evaluated for treatment of GERD.
 - The LINX™ Reflux Management System is an implant that consists of a ring that fits around the esophagus and is intended to prevent reflux of bile and acid from the stomach into the esophagus. According to the company website, the LINX system is a small flexible band of interlinked titanium beads with magnetic cores. The magnetic attraction is intended to help the LES resist opening to gastric pressures, preventing reflux from the stomach into the esophagus. A surgeon uses a laparoscopic incision to implant the device around the patient’s esophagus just above the stomach while the patient is under general anesthesia.

Achalasia is a condition that affects the esophagus. It is a relatively rare cause of dysphagia manifested by esophageal aperistalsis and failure of relaxation of a hypertensive lower esophageal sphincter (LES) (Kohn 2019). Current treatment options include pharmacological, endoscopic, and surgical.

- The Per Oral Endoscopic Myotomy (POEM) procedure is a technique that involves guiding an endoscope through the esophagus, making an incision in the mucosa, creating a submucosal tunnel for access to the lower esophagus and gastroesophageal junction, and cutting the muscle fibers in the lower esophagus and proximal stomach. Internal incisions are closed with clips after myotomy is complete. POEM is an intricate endoscopic procedure that requires advanced endoscopic skills, knowledge of surgical anatomy, and expertise in submucosal endoscopy and management of adverse events (Khasab et al., 2020).

Diffuse esophageal spasm (also known as distal esophageal spasm) is a condition that leads to premature and rapidly produced contractions in the distal esophagus. Most patients present with difficulty swallowing and often have a sensation of foods stuck in their esophagus. Distal esophageal spasm is distinguished from other esophageal motility disorders that are associated with dysphagia by esophageal manometry testing.

Per Oral Endoscopic Myotomy (POEM)

Huang et al. (2021) completed a systematic review and meta-analysis to evaluate the safety and efficacy of POEM in patients with achalasia and a previous Heller myotomy (HM). A search was conducted using PubMed, Embase, and the Cochrane Library. A total of 9 observational studies involving 272 patients were found. Primary outcomes included clinical success as defined by pre- and post-op Eckardt scores, lower esophageal sphincter (LES) pressure and integrated relaxation pressure (IRP) scores; secondary outcome included safety assessment as defined by adverse events and incidence of postop GERD. All 9 studies reported a significant reduction in the Eckardt score by 5.14 (95% CI, 4.19-6.09), with significant heterogeneity. Clinical success was achieved in 90% of the patients. LES pressure and IRP were significantly lowered by 12.01 mm Hg and 10.02 mm Hg, respectively. AEs were reported in 6 studies with mucosal injury as the most common, and this occurred in 11 patients. Based on the analysis, the authors concluded that POEM is a safe and effective treatment for patients with achalasia; this was supported by the favorable Eckardt scores and manometry parameters.

Limitations included lack of comparison to other approaches, non-randomization, considerable heterogeneity across all outcome measures, and short-term follow-up. Additional prospective, controlled studies with long-term follow-up are warranted to confirm these findings.

Chandan et al. (2020) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to evaluate the efficacy of POEM in patients with spastic esophageal disorders (SED) and if variation in total myotomy length or prior endoscopic treatment had any impact on the clinical success. A comprehensive literature search in PubMed, EMBASE, Google-Scholar, Scopus, and Cochrane Review retrieved 9 studies which included 210 patients; of the 9 studies, 3 studies were prospective and the other 6 were retrospective. Several outcomes were assessed and clinical success was defined as achieving an Eckardt score ≤ 3 post-intervention. The overall clinical success rate was documented at 89.6% with low heterogeneity. Symptomatic reflux was also analyzed and all but one study reported that patients with reflux responded with proton pump inhibitor therapy. Follow-up periods ranged from 2.7 months to 27 months. Other adverse events included chest/epigastric pain that required hospitalization, esophageal leak, pneumothorax and post-op pain. The authors concluded that, while POEM is safe and effective for SED, total myotomy length and prior endoscopic or medical treatments had no effect on its clinical success. Limitations included lack of comparison to another approach, retrospective design, and all studies were performed in tertiary-care centers thereby not giving a true representation of the general population. (Khashab (2018) is included in this systematic review.)

In a prospective multicenter randomized open label trial, Werner et al. (2019) compared POEM to laparoscopic Heller's myotomy (LHM) plus fundoplication in 221 patients with achalasia using a design to demonstrate non-inferiority. The patients were randomly assigned in a 1:1 ratio to undergo either POEM or LHM plus fundoplication. The POEM procedure was performed by a physician with formal POEM training including esophageal interventions such as endoscopic mucosal resection and submucosal dissection; LHM was performed according to current standards. Clinical data was collected at three, six, 12, and 24 months; patient assessment was performed with phone calls, mail, and follow-up appointments. The Eckardt symptom score was the validated questionnaire used which identified success with a score of three or less by the two-year follow up appointment. Clinical success at the 2-year follow-up was observed in 83.0% of patients in the POEM group and 81.7% of patients in the LHM group (difference, 1.4 percentage points; 95% confidence interval [CI], -8.7 to 11.4; $P = 0.007$ for noninferiority). Limitations included lack of obtaining appropriate consent from patients, lack of blinding, and surgeon experience was superior for LHM versus POEM. The authors concluded POEM was non-inferior to LHM in controlling symptoms of achalasia at two years with less adverse events; it was noted the patients with the POEM procedure were more common to experience gastroesophageal reflux than the patients who underwent LHM.

In a health technology assessment by Hayes (2019), POEM has a "potential but unproven benefit" as an alternative to laparoscopic Heller myotomy in patients with esophageal achalasia. The authors of the report conclude that the available low-quality evidence suggested the POEM procedure is generally safe and may achieve at least similar results to both laparoscopic Heller myotomy (LHM) and pneumatic dilation (PD) for most efficacy outcomes. The body of evidence on POEM vs. LHM was of moderate size including 16 studies, whereas evidence on POEM versus PD was presented in only four studies. It is suggested additional studies of fair to good quality are needed to reveal optimal treatment protocols and provide information for longer-term outcomes.

In a systematic review, which did not include the Werner study cited above, Li et al. (2019) investigated the long-term efficacy and safety of POEM with follow-up period over two years. Ten eligible studies met the inclusion criteria and were published between January 2015 and November 2017. A total of 372 patients successfully underwent POEM with one failure due to serious inflammation and adhesion of the esophagus. The mean follow-up period was 30 months. The mean preoperative and postoperative Eckhart scores decreased from 7.4 to 1.4, respectively. The authors found POEM to be effective and safe for the treatment of achalasia during the two years long-term follow-up duration. It was concluded further multi-center studies with randomization comparing POEM with other treatment modalities are warranted for the future. Limitations included small sample size for most of the studies and lack of comparison to other approaches. He et al. (2019) (not included in the systematic reviews cited above) collected prospective data in a case series of 115 patients to evaluate the long-term efficacy of POEM for patients with achalasia. The Eckardt scoring system was used and success was found in 91.3% of the patients. Twenty-one patients were found to have symptoms of reflux during the two-year follow-up. The authors concluded that POEM was safe and effective for treating achalasia with favorable long-term outcomes. The findings are limited by lack of comparison group.

In a 2018 retrospective multicenter study, Khashab et al. assessed the technical success, clinical response, and adverse events of POEM in 50 patients with non-achalasia esophageal motility disorders such as esophagogastric junction outflow obstruction (EGJO), diffuse esophageal spasm (DES), and jackhammer esophagus (JE). Patients diagnosed with achalasia were excluded. Just over half of the patients were treatment naïve. The results showed that POEM was successful in all 50 patients, and nine AEs were reported: 55.6% were rated as mild and 44.4% as moderate with no severe events. At the median follow up time of 242 days, 42 patients achieved clinical success and the majority had complete or almost complete resolution of symptoms. Reflux symptoms developed in 22.2% of patients, all of whom were successfully treated with proton pump inhibitors. The authors concluded that POEM is safe and effective for the management of non-achalasia esophageal motility disorders and randomized trials are needed to confirm these findings. The findings are limited by lack of comparison group.

Khan et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of the published literature regarding the efficacy and safety of per-oral endoscopic myotomy (POEM) for the treatment of all spastic esophageal disorders (SEDs). Included were ninety-eight full studies of five or more patients that reported clinical success and post procedure adverse events and included eight observational studies that included follow up ranging from 3 months to 3 years were included in the meta-analysis. Three studies were prospective and the remaining 5 were retrospective. The total number of patients was 179, with the following diagnoses: 116 had type III achalasia, 37 had jackhammer esophagus, 18 had diffuse esophageal spasm, and 8 had hypertensive non-relaxing lower esophageal sphincter. The results showed a weighted mean pooled rate (WPR) of success of POEM for type III achalasia at 87%, jackhammer esophagus was 72%, and diffuse esophageal spasm at 88%. The WPR of success of POEM for all SEDs was 87%. All studies reported adverse events and showed a WPR of 11% for type III achalasia, 16% for jackhammer esophagus and 14% for diffuse esophageal spasm. The authors concluded that POEM is a highly effective and safe treatment modality for treating SEDs, and larger prospective studies are required to validate these results. The findings are however limited by lack of comparison group.

Crespin et al. (2017) performed a systematic review of the literature to evaluate the efficacy and safety of POEM. Of the 19 studies meeting the inclusion criteria, ten were retrospective and nine were prospective studies. No randomized controlled trials were identified. The Eckardt score was used for assessing the severity of achalasia and all 19 studies reported a pre- and post-POEM score; success and effectiveness was defined as a score of ≤ 3 . In addition, the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) pressure was reported for ten of the studies. The study had several limitations; the goal was to include studies with more than ten cases, but a few had to be excluded. In addition, the length of myotomy was not uniformly performed and reported. And finally, sigmoid esophagus and the presence of previous treatments may make POEM more challenging and data less comparable. The authors concluded that POEM appears to be promising and an effective, safe option for achalasia. Future studies should aim research at better define complications and standard postoperative changes.

Marano et al. (2016) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to investigate the efficacy and safety of POEM compared with LHM for the treatment of achalasia. The search produced 11 studies. The total number of included patients was 486 (196 in POEM group and 290 in LHM group) ranging from eight to 180 patients per study. The Eckardt score was used in five of the studies which showed non-statistically significant difference between POEM and LHM favoring POEM. The review and analysis identified some limitations including high heterogeneity rate, no randomization of patients and significant publication bias. Furthermore, all selected studies did not report follow-up results past one year. The authors concluded additional high-quality clinical trials with randomization and long-term evaluation comparing POEM with other standard procedures are needed.

Zenker's Peroral Endoscopic Myotomy (Z-POEM)

Peroral endoscopic myotomy (POEM) is a novel technique in the treatment of Zenker's diverticulum (ZD). Currently there is insufficient evidence regarding the effectiveness of POEM for treatment ZD. Additional studies with comparative groups are needed to support the safety and efficacy of this technique along with long-term effectiveness.

Budnicka et al. (2021) conducted a multicenter retrospective case series aimed at analyzing the feasibility of POEM for Zenker's diverticula. Twenty-two patients with various degrees of dysphagia diagnosed with symptomatic ZD were included. Primary outcomes were the rate of technical success and the procedure's clinical success. These were defined by completion of all procedural steps and resolution of dysphagia or resolution of symptoms. POEM was successful in all 22 patients; no severe or fatal adverse outcomes were reported. Clinical success was achieved in twenty patients; two patients continued with persistent dysphagia. The authors concluded Z-POEM as a viable option for treatment in relieving dysphagia and other related symptoms. However, limitations included retrospective design, small sample size, lack of comparison group, and short-term outcomes. Additional future studies should include comparative studies with long term efficacy.

A retrospective multicenter case series on the use of POEM in the management of Zenker's diverticulum was conducted by Yang et al. (2020). A total of 75 participants from ten different international centers who underwent Z-POEM between January 2014 and November 2018 were included. Diagnoses of ZD was confirmed by endoscopy along with a dysphagia score from Dakkak and Bennett scoring system (0 = no dysphagia; 1 = dysphagia to solids; 2 = dysphagia to semisolids; 3 = dysphagia to liquids; 4 = complete dysphagia). Patients scores were obtained pre- and post-procedure. Success was defined as complete or near resolution of dysphagia; this was confirmed by the Dakkak and Bennett scores. Clinical success was achieved in 69 of the 75 patients; these patients had a decrease in their dysphagia score from 1.96 to .25. Only eight patients had follow-up for two years; thirty-one patients had a 12-month follow-up and fourteen had 18-months. The author's conclusions suggest that Z-POEM is safe and feasible for treatment of symptomatic ZD. However, limitations such as variations and restrictions in follow-up and lack of standardized management across multiple centers suggest additional comparative studies with long-term outcomes are needed.

Albers et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review analyzing endoscopic versus surgical treatment of Zenker's diverticulum. Out of 357 articles, 11 studies met the inclusion criteria, all cohort studies. Common endoscopic treatments included stapling of the diverticulectomy, CO2 laser and harmonic scalpel. Surgical approaches included cricopharyngeal myotomy and suspension, inversion, or excision of pouch, myotomy only and Dolman's procedure with pouch excision only. Meta-analysis revealed a significant reduction in the risk of recurrence of symptoms with use of the surgical approach compared to endoscopic treatment. However, for complications, it was shown fewer occurred with endoscopic treatment versus that of the surgical approach. The authors found when compared with a surgical approach, the endoscopic approach appears to result in shorter facility stays, earlier diet introduction and lower rates of complications, but demonstrates a higher rate of recurrence in symptoms. Limitations included studies with only retrospective cohorts (no RCTs comparing the techniques) and a large loss to follow-up.

Clinical Practice Guidelines

American Gastroenterological Association (AGA)

The AGA recommends POEM be considered as a primary therapy for type III achalasia. Given the complexity of the POEM procedure, the AGA also recommends the procedure be performed by experienced physicians in high-volume centers to achieve procedure competence (Kahrilas et al., 2017).

American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE)

The ASGE identifies laparoscopic Heller myotomy, pneumatic dilation, and POEM as effective therapeutic modalities for patients with achalasia. The decision made between these treatment options should depend on achalasia type, local expertise, and patient preference (Khashab et al., 2020).

Society of American Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)

In a clinical practice guideline, SAGES (Stefanidis et al. 2012) provided the following recommendation for surgical treatment of esophageal achalasia:

- Laparoscopic myotomy can be performed safely and with minimal morbidity in appropriately selected patients by appropriately trained surgeons. (Level of evidence +++++, strong recommendation)

- Laparoscopic myotomy with partial fundoplication provides superior and longer-lasting symptom relief with low morbidity for patients with achalasia compared with other treatment modalities and should be considered the procedure of choice to treat achalasia. (Level of evidence +++++, strong recommendation).

Endoscopic Therapies for Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)

A comparative effectiveness review by Hayes (2017, updated 2022) analyzes several endoscopic procedures and their effectiveness to treat symptoms of GERD. While these therapies may improve symptoms in the short term, many devices have been introduced and subsequently withdrawn from the market. Both Stretta and EsophyX have “potential but unproven benefit” and published evidence for the use of Medigus Ultrasonic Surgical Endostapler (MUSE) shows the technology has no proven benefit and is unsafe. Upcoming studies and ongoing clinical trials may address gaps in the current literature; future studies should focus on robust RCTs, larger population of participants and long-term efficacy.

Radiofrequency Energy (Stretta System)

Currently there is insufficient evidence regarding the effectiveness of radiofrequency energy for gastroesophageal conditions and its role must be better defined in statistically robust, well-designed clinical trials with long-term results.

In a 2020 randomized, double blind, sham controlled multi-center study, Zerbib et al. assessed the efficacy of esophageal radiofrequency (Stretta® system, Mederi Therapeutics) in sixty-two patients with moderate to severe gastro-esophageal reflux disease at least three times a week and refractory to proton pump inhibitors (PPIs). Completed questionnaires consisting of the Gastrointestinal Symptoms Rating Scale (GSRS) and the Quality of Life in Reflux and Dyspepsia (QOLRAD) were collected. Patients were then randomized to receive either esophageal radiofrequency, or a sham procedure performed by a physician who would not be involved in follow up to maintain double blinding. All patients were instructed to take a double dose of PPIs after the procedure, and follow-up visits were planned at weeks 4, 8, 12, 18, 24 and end of study at 48 weeks post-procedure to assess symptom relief, PPI use and any side effects. The intake of antacids as well as the presence of other digestive symptoms were also assessed. At each visit, if symptoms were adequately controlled, patients were instructed to decrease PPI from a double to a single dose, and as improvement continued, to “on demand” use. For patients who were having success, at week 24, an upper gastrointestinal endoscopy was performed (for therapeutic failures, the patients were offered an open esophageal radiofrequency procedure with the same follow-up). Five patients were lost to follow-up, and one withdrew his consent to participate, resulting in 26 patients being treated, and 30 patients treated with the sham procedure. The results showed that there was no significant difference between the treatment and sham groups at weeks 24 and 48 regarding days without heartburn, days without any other digestive symptoms, PPIs and antacids intake, and the number of patients not taking PPIs. There were no procedure related safety issues. The authors concluded that esophageal radiofrequency is a relatively invasive procedure for a benign disorder and did not demonstrate efficacy for the treatment of GERD refractory to PPIs.

Viswanath et al. (2019) reported a prospective case series of 50 patients who underwent endoscopic antireflux radiofrequency treatment (Stretta) for refractory GERD. Assessment involved the use of the Gastro-oesophageal Reflux Disease-Health-Related Quality of Life (GERD-HRQL) questionnaire, which evaluated symptoms and proton pump inhibitor (PPI) dependency, before and after treatment. Median follow-up post treatment was 771 days. The average GERD-HRQL score improved from 46.2/75 (± 14.2) before Stretta treatment to 15.2/75 (± 17.3) after Stretta treatment. The authors concluded that in select patients with GORD, Stretta improves quality of life and decreases PPI dependency, and is a viable option for patients who are unwilling or unable to undergo surgery. They also concluded that randomized controlled trials with larger patient populations are needed to further assess Stretta. Limitations of this study include lack of concurrent comparison group, its small numbers, and that the pre-Stretta assessments were carried out by a variety of teams thus the potential for inconsistencies.

In another case series, Noar et al. (2017) prospectively assessed and compared patient-reported outcomes in 18 patients refractive to laparoscopic Nissen fundoplication (LNF) and 81 patients with gastrointestinal reflux disease (GERD) refractory to medical management that all underwent Stretta during 10-year follow-up. Patient-reported outcomes measured were GERD-HRQL (health-related quality of life), patient satisfaction scores, and daily medication requirements. The refractory LNF subset demonstrated median improvements in GERD-HRQL, satisfaction, and medication use at all follow-up time points \geq six months to 10 years, which was significant from a baseline of both on- and off-medications ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, at 10 years, median GERD-HRQL decreased from 36 to 7 ($p < 0.001$), satisfaction increased from 1 to 4 ($p < 0.001$), and medication score decreased from 7 to 6 ($p = 0.040$). Nine patients decreased medication use by half at 10 years. No significant differences existed between refractory LNF and standard refractory GERD subsets at any follow-up time point \geq six months to 10 years ($p > 0.05$) after Stretta. At 10 years, no significant differences were noted between refractory LNF and standard Stretta subsets

regarding medication use ($p = 0.088$), patient satisfaction ($p = 0.573$), and GERD-HRQL ($p = 0.075$). Stretta procedures were completed without difficulty or significant intraoperative or long-term adverse events. The authors concluded that within a small series of patients with refractory LNF, Stretta resulted in sustained improvement over 10 years with equivalent outcomes to non-LNF standard Stretta patients. Study limitations include lack of concurrent comparison group, non-randomization, and small patient population.

Kalapala et al. (2017) reported short outcomes (three months) from a prospective randomized study comparing the Stretta treatment with controls receiving proton pump inhibitors (PPIs). Patients ($n = 20$) with symptoms of heartburn, regurgitation, abnormal esophageal acid exposure ($\geq 4\%$), and endoscopically confirmed esophagitis were included into the study. The primary measure was improvement in quality of life (QOL) and decrease in the frequency and severity of GERD symptoms. The mean age of the patients was 39 (± 15) years and controls were 34 (± 11) years. Three months after Stretta, 80% reported improvement in QOL compared to 40% in the control group. At the end of three months, significant ($p < 0.05$) improvement in GERD symptom score for heartburn, regurgitation, chest pain, and cough compared with the control group was observed. After Stretta treatment, 60% of the patients were free of PPIs whereas there was no change in the control group. Almost 80% of the patients on Stretta treatment were satisfied with the treatment compared to 30% of the patients in the control group. The study was limited by the small sample size and short follow-up, therefore, randomized controlled trials with larger patient populations and longer follow-up periods are needed to further assess Stretta.

Fass et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled and cohort studies to determine the efficacy of the Stretta procedure in treating patients with GERD. Twenty-eight studies (four RCTs, 23 cohort studies, and one registry) representing 2,468 unique patients using Stretta were included in the meta-analysis. The (unweighted) mean follow-up time for the 28 studies was 25.4 [14.0, 36.7] months. The pooled results showed that the Stretta reduced (improved) the health-related quality of life score by -14.6 [-16.48, -12.73] ($p < 0.001$). Stretta also reduced (improved) the pooled heartburn standardized score by -1.53 [-1.97, -1.09] ($p < 0.001$). After Stretta treatment, only 49% of the patients using proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) at baseline required PPIs at follow-up ($P < 0.001$). The Stretta treatment reduced the incidence of erosive esophagitis by 24% ($p < 0.001$) and reduced esophageal acid exposure by a mean of -3.01 [-3.72, -2.30] ($p < 0.001$). Lower esophageal sphincter (LES) basal pressure was increased post Stretta therapy by a mean of 1.73 [-0.29, 3.74] mmHg ($p = \text{NS}$). The authors concluded that the Stretta procedure significantly improves subjective and objective clinical endpoints, except LES basal pressure, and therefore should be considered as a viable alternative in managing GERD. The findings are however primarily explain by the included observational studies with overlap in some outcomes effect size between control and intervention groups of the included RCTs. Longer-term outcomes are needed to further evaluate the Stretta procedure. (Aziz et al. (2010), Coron et al. (2008), Dugher et al. (2014) and Noar et al. (2014) which were previously cited in this policy are included in this meta-analysis).

Arts et al. (2012) conducted a small double-blind randomized cross-over study of Stretta and sham treatment (included in the Fass et al. (2017) systematic review above). Patients underwent two upper gastrointestinal endoscopies with three months interval, during which active or sham Stretta treatment was performed in a randomized double-blind manner. In all, 22 GERD patients (17 females, mean age 47 \pm 12 years) participated in the study; 11 in each group. Initial sham treatment did not affect any of the parameters studied. Three months after initial Stretta procedure, no changes were observed in esophageal acid exposure and lower esophageal sphincter (LES) pressure. In contrast, symptom score was significantly improved, and gastro-esophageal junction (GEJ) compliance was significantly decreased. Administration of sildenafil, an esophageal smooth muscle relaxant, normalized GEJ compliance to pre-Stretta level, arguing against GEJ fibrosis as the underlying mechanism. The authors concluded that Stretta improved GERD symptoms and decreased GEJ compliance. According to the authors, the limitation of this study was reflux evaluation did not include impedance monitoring. The study was also limited by a small patient population, short follow-up, and lack of comparison to other surgical alternatives.

Jeansonne et al. (2009) conducted a cohort study to compare the effectiveness of endoscopic full-thickness plication (FTP) to endoscopic radiofrequency treatments for patients with GERD. Follow-up data was obtained for 63 patients (mean follow-up was six months), 51% of the original cohort. Outcome measures included comparison of medication use, symptom scores, and pH values at baseline and follow-up. In the RF group, patients with moderate to severe heartburn decreased from 55% to 22%, and PPI use decreased from 84% to 50%. Decreases were also seen for dysphagia, voice symptoms, and cough. The pH values were unchanged. In the FTP group, patients with moderate to severe heartburn decreased from 53% to 43%, and PPI use decreased from 95% to 43%. Percentage of time that the pH was less than four decreased from 10.0% to 6.1%. Decreases were also seen for regurgitation, voice symptoms, and dysphagia. According to the investigators, RF and FTP both resulted in a decrease in both PPI use and in scores for voice symptoms and dysphagia. In addition, RF resulted in decreased heartburn and

cough, while FTP resulted in the most dramatic reduction in regurgitation. The investigators concluded that both procedures are effective, providing symptomatic relief and reduction in PPI use. For patients whose chief complaint is regurgitation, FTP may be the preferred procedure. Study limitations included lack of randomization, large loss-to-follow up, which could introduce biases in the findings, small sample size, and short follow-up.

Numerous other non-randomized and non-comparative cohort studies evaluated radiofrequency energy for the treatment of GERD (Dughera et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2011; White et al., 2009; Dundon et al., 2008; Noar and Lotfi-Emran et al., 2007; Reymunde and Santiago, 2007; Lutfi et al., 2005). The body of evidence is of low quality due to overall weaknesses in study design, including lack of comparison groups, lack of randomization, short follow-up periods, and small patient populations.

Endoscopic Plication or Suturing

There is a lack of quality evidence to support the use of endoscopic plication or suturing for GERD; additional studies are needed to support the safety and efficacy of these techniques with long-term effectiveness.

Testoni et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on long-term outcomes of TIF for patients with GERD. A search of publications through May of 2020 returned eight articles with long term outcomes of greater than three years for analysis. Outcomes evaluated in the analysis included overall patient satisfaction, daily PPI consumption, GERD-health related quality of life (GERD-HRQL) scores, normalization of heartburn and regurgitation scores before and after the TIF procedure. The authors found TIF resulted in long-term patient satisfaction with reduction in PPI use in approximately 75% of the patients over a five-year period. At the ten-year mark, about two-thirds of the patients were satisfied. The findings are however limited by lack of comparison group for most of the included studies.

EndoCinch

According to a Hayes report (2017, updated 2021) that compares endoscopic therapies for GERD, the EndoCinch device has been discontinued and is no longer manufactured.

Endoscopic Plicator or Suturing

Kalapala et al. (2021) conducted a randomized, double blinded sham-controlled trial to assess the safety and efficacy of endoscopic full-thickness fundoplication (EFTP) in patients with GERD that were dependent on PPI therapy. Seventy participants were assigned to one of two groups: one received the endoscopic full-thickness fundoplication (EFTP) and the other the sham therapy. The sham procedure positioned the device 1 cm below the gastro-esophageal junction, but the sutures were not deployed like in the EFTP procedure. Patient follow-up was completed at three, six, and 12 months along with telephone calls made every two to four weeks. In the EFTP group, 65.7% of patients obtained a 50% or more reduction in GERD-HRQL score compared with only 2.9% in the sham group. The PPI dependence at 12 months in the sham group was significantly higher than that of the EFTP group. The authors concluded that EFTP appears to be a new promising alternative to surgery for patients that may not want to continue with long-term PPI therapy, however larger trials with longer follow-up periods are required to confirm the benefits.

De Moura et al. (2018) evaluated long-term results of 47 patients non-responsive to PPIs who underwent endoluminal plication (n = 26) or polymer injection (n = 21) for the treatment of GERD as part of a case series. The number of patients with no response to endoscopic treatment with reintroduction of PPIs increased in time for both techniques. There was symptomatic improvement up to 12 months, with progressive loss of this trending up to 60 months for both procedures. Health-related quality of life score (GERD-HRQL) demonstrated total response in both procedures at one, three, six, and 12 months. The 60-month analysis showed an increased number of patients with no response in both groups. The quality-of-life assessment (SF-36) showed benefit in polymer injection up to three months and showed a higher rate of complications. There were no deaths. There was healing of esophagitis at three months in 45% of patients in polymer injection and 40% in endoluminal plication. There was no improvement in manometric or pH findings. The authors concluded that endoscopic therapies were ineffective in controlling GERD in the long term. Limitations included lack of randomization and lack of uniform objective data analysis.

In an RCT, Antoniou et al. (2012) evaluated the effectiveness of endoscopic plication and laparoscopic fundoplication in terms of QOL and symptom control. A total of 60 patients with documented GERD were randomly assigned to undergo either endoscopic plication or laparoscopic fundoplication. QOL scores and symptom grading were recorded before treatment and at 3- and 12-months of follow-up. Twenty-nine patients from the endoscopic group and 27 patients from the operative group were

available at follow-up. QOL scores showed a substantial and similar increase for both groups after treatment. Symptoms of heartburn, regurgitation, and asthma were significantly improved in the endoscopic group, whereas laparoscopic fundoplication was more effective in controlling symptoms of heartburn and regurgitation compared to the endoscopic procedure. The authors concluded that endoscopic plication and laparoscopic fundoplication resulted in significant symptom improvement with similar QOL scores in a selected patient population with GERD, whereas operative treatment was more effective in the relief of heartburn and regurgitation at the expense of higher short-term dysphagia rates. Small sample size and lack of long-term follow-up limit the validity of these conclusions.

In a randomized, single-blind, prospective, multicenter trial by Rothstein et al. (2006), 159 patients were selected to either undergo endoscopic full-thickness restructuring of the gastric cardia with transmural suture (n = 78) or a sham procedure (n = 81) to determine the effectiveness of endoscopic full-thickness plication for the treatment of GERD. Group assignments were revealed following the three-month evaluation. By intention-to-treat analysis, at three months, the proportion of patients achieving $\geq 50\%$ improvement in GERD-HRQL score was significantly greater in the active group compared with the sham group. Complete cessation of PPI therapy was higher among patients in the active group than in the sham group. However, the median percent time that pH < 4 was not differently improved between the active and sham group. Between-group analysis revealed the active therapy was superior to sham treatment in improving the median percent time that the pH value was < 4. The authors concluded that endoscopic full-thickness plication was effective in reducing GERD symptoms and PPI use compared with a sham procedure. Additional studies are needed to evaluate the durability of endoscopic full-thickness plication for the treatment of GERD, as this study is limited by a relatively short follow-up.

GERDx™

Weitzendorfer et al. (2018) assessed the clinical safety and efficiency of the GERDx™ device by evaluating clinical parameters, reflux symptom scores, and quality of life (QoL) in a case series. Patients (n = 40) with at least one typical reflux symptom despite treatment with a PPI for > six months, pathologic esophageal acid exposure, hiatal hernia of size < 2 cm, and endoscopic Hill grade II-III were included. Evaluation of Gastrointestinal Quality of Life Index (GIQLI), symptom scores, esophageal manometry, and impedance-pH-monitoring were performed at baseline and at three months after surgery. Four out of forty patients experienced postoperative complications requiring intervention. Seven of forty patients were subjected to laparoscopic fundoplication three months after endoscopic plication due to persistent symptoms and were lost to further follow-up. Thirty out of forty patients were available at three-month follow-up. There was an improvement of the GIQLI score, from a mean of 92.45 ± 18.47 to 112.03 ± 13.11 ($p < 0.001$). The general reflux-specific score increased from a mean of 49.84 ± 24.83 to 23.93 ± 15.63 ($p < 0.001$), and the DeMeester score from a mean of 46.48 ± 30.83 to 20.03 ± 23.62 ($p < 0.001$). There was no significant change in manometric data after intervention. Three of thirty patients continued daily antireflux medication. The authors concluded that endoscopic plication with the GERDx™ device reduced distal acid exposure of the esophagus, reflux-related symptoms, and improved GIQLI scores with minimal side effects in a selected cohort of patients and may be a safe alternative in the treatment of GERD. Randomized clinical trials with larger patient populations and longer follow-up periods are needed to further assess GERDx.

MUSE™

Kim et al. (2016) reported in a case series long-term outcomes from the Zacherl et al. (2015) MUSE study using the Medigus Ultrasonic Surgical Endostapler (MUSE™). Efficacy and safety data for 37 patients were analyzed at baseline, six months, and four years post-procedure. In one center (IU), efficacy and safety data were evaluated at baseline, six months post-procedure, and then annually up to four years. No new complications were reported in their long-term analysis. The proportions of patients who remained off daily PPI were 83.8 % (31/37) at six months and 69.4 % (25/36) at four years post-procedure. GERD-Health Related Quality of Life (HRQL) scores (off PPI) were significantly decreased from baseline to six months and four years post-procedure. The daily dosage of GERD medications, measured as omeprazole equivalents (mean \pm SD, mg), decreased from 66.1 ± 33.2 at baseline to 10.8 ± 15.9 at six months and 12.8 ± 19.4 at four years post-procedure (< 0.01). The authors concluded that the MUSE™ stapling device appears to be safe and effective in improving symptom scores as well as reducing PPI use in patients with GERD and that the results appeared to be equal to or better than those of the other devices for endoluminal GERD therapy. Future studies with larger patient series, sham control group, and greater number of staples are awaited to further evaluate MUSE. Findings are limited by lack of comparison group.

Zacherl et al. (2015) reported six-month outcomes from a multi-center prospective case series using the MUSE™ for the treatment of GERD (n = 69; three lost to follow-up). Six months after the procedure, the GERD-HRQL score improved by > 50% off PPI in 73% (48/66) of patients (95% CI 60–83%). Forty-two patients (64.6%) were no longer using daily PPI medication. Of

the 23 patients who continued to take PPI following the procedure, 13 (56.5%) reported a $\geq 50\%$ reduction in dose. The mean percent of total time with esophageal pH < 4.0 decreased from baseline to six months ($p < 0.001$). Common adverse events were peri-operative chest discomfort and sore throat. Two severe adverse events requiring intervention occurred in the first 24 subjects, no further esophageal injury or leaks were reported in the remaining 48 enrolled subjects. Early experience with the device necessitated procedure and device changes to improve safety, with improved results in the later portion of the study. Continued assessment of durability and safety are ongoing in a three-year follow-up study of this patient group. Findings are limited by lack of comparison group.

Other clinical trials regarding endoscopic plicator or suturing are limited to observational case series that do not allow for conclusions about durability and long-term effectiveness (Birk et al., 2009; von Renteln et al., 2009).

Polymer Injection and Implantation Techniques

Plexiglas and Durasphere

The available evidence for plexiglas and Durasphere techniques for gastroesophageal conditions is insufficient to consider the procedure proven to be effective and safe; additional randomized studies are warranted.

In a small case series, Ganz et al. (2009) assessed the long-term safety and effectiveness of Durasphere (Carbon Medical Technologies), an injectable bulking agent, in the treatment of mild to moderate GERD. Nine patients completed the 12-month trial. There were no adverse events. The procedure was well tolerated with minimal patient discomfort and no dysphagia. At 12 months, 70% of patients discontinued all antacid medication completely and 90% of patients reduced PPI use by greater than 50%. There were no reports of esophagitis (at 12 months), erosion, ulceration, or sloughing of material at any injection site. The Durasphere material did not appear to migrate. The authors concluded that Durasphere appears to be a promising new injectable bulking agent for the treatment of mild to moderate GERD, with demonstrable efficacy and no significant adverse events in a small cohort of patients. Study limitations include lack of control group and small number of subjects.

Chen et al. (2009) conducted a systematic review that included 33 studies examining seven endoscopic procedures (Stretta procedure, Bard EndoCinch, Wilson-Cook Endoscopic Suturing Device, NDO Plicator, Enteryx, Gatekeeper Reflux Repair System and Plexiglas). Of the three procedures that were compared with sham controls (Stretta procedure, Bard EndoCinch and Enteryx), patient outcomes in the treatment group were either as good as, or significantly better than, those of control patients in terms of heartburn symptoms, QOL, and medication usage. However, for the two procedures that were compared with the laparoscopic fundoplication (Stretta) procedure and the Bard EndoCinch device, outcomes for patients in the endoscopic group were conflicting. Some patients in the endoscopic group experienced comparable outcomes as patients undergoing the laparoscopic approach, while others experienced inferior outcomes. The authors concluded that there is insufficient evidence to determine the safety and efficacy of endoscopic procedures for GERD, particularly over the long term (Chen et al., 2009).

LINX Reflux Management System

There is insufficient evidence to conclude LINX is effective and safe on the long-term for GERD treatment; additional research involving larger, randomized control trials with long-term outcomes is needed to establish its safety and efficacy, in the context of other mechanical approaches to GERD treatment that have shown benefits on the short-term but not on the long-term.

A report from Hayes (2021) researched published studies comparing EsophyX Device with LINX Reflux Management System for the management of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). No direct comparison of these two could be found and the evidence continues to be insufficient to determine the superiority of either the LINX or EsophyX systems. (Asti (2016) and Warren (2016) previously cited in this policy are included in this report.)

Zhuang et al. (2021) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis to determine the efficacy and safety of magnetic sphincter augmentation (MSA) in the management of refractory GERD as well as comparing MSA efficacy to proton pump inhibitor (PPI) or laparoscopic Nissen fundoplication (LNF). Ten single-arm studies, one randomized controlled trial and three cohort studies involving 1138 participants were included. Post-MSA PPI withdrawal, significant GERD-HRQL improvement and AET normalization were achieved in 87.0%, 88.0% and 75.0% of the patients, individually. The incidence of postoperative dysphagia was 29% and endoscopic dilation was required in 7.4% of patients undergoing MSA. MSA showed a better efficacy in symptom control than PPI (PPI cessation: 91% vs 0%; GERD-HRQL improvement: 81% vs 8%) and similar effectiveness but a lower risk of gas-bloat syndrome (risk ratio [RR] 0.69, 95% confidence interval [CI] 0.51-0.93, $P = 0.01$) and better reserved

ability to belch (RR 1.48, 95% CI 0.76-2.86, P = 0.25) compared with LNF. Study limitations included the following: limited number of clinical studies; only three studies were included in the comparative results between MSA and LNF; and potential for selection bias that could have led to an overestimation of efficacy in MSA since the patient selection had less severe GERD. The authors concluded that MSA was an effective and safe therapy for GERD for patients with PPI-refractory symptoms and pathological reflux. There was only one randomized comparative trial that presented an advantage over a double dose of PPI. Therefore, there is a need for additional randomized trials that compare the efficacy of MSA with other therapies. (Bonavina (2010), Lipham (2012), Ganz (2103 and 2016), Saino (2015) and Warren (2016) previously cited in this policy are included in this meta-analysis.)

Chandan et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on patients undergoing treatment for refractory GERD and compared the efficacy of magnetic sphincter augmentation (MSA) with that of transoral incisionless fundoplication (TIF2). Twenty-four articles were included in the analysis which consisted of 1,074 patients that underwent MSA, and 868 patients underwent TIF2. In the MSA cohort, six studies were prospective, and three studies were retrospective; in the TIF cohort, eleven studies were prospective and four were retrospective. The authors found the clinical success rate, demonstrated by improvement of scores in GERD HRQL, was 80% for MSA and 77% for TIF. It was concluded that both procedures have a similar efficacy, but MSA seem to outperform TIF2. Overall, 91.3% of the MSA patients were able to discontinue PPI therapy compared to 63.8% of the TIF2 patients. Limitations included lack of long-term data.

An ECRI clinical assessment on the LINX® Reflux Management System for treating GERD identified a review of evidence from 2017 through 2020 that included two systematic reviews, one randomized control trial, one retrospective pre-post study and two economic studies. It was concluded larger multicenter RCTs and longer follow-up with comparisons of LINX with other GERD devices would be useful; currently there are ongoing trials that may partially address these evidence gaps. An updated assessment did not provide any additional evidence to change the previous conclusion (ECRI, 2021).

Based on a review of the evidence from Hayes for the Magnetic Sphincter Augmentation (LINX Reflux Management System) for treatment of GERD, it was concluded that while the body of evidence was low, MSA appears to be safe and effective with GERD improvement. The authors concluded that this device may be a good choice for patients that do not want to undergo a more invasive surgery. However, it was identified that there was a lack of long-term efficacy and safety assessments performed. The 2021 annual review did not provide any new information (Hayes, 2021).

Bell et al. (2020) compared the effects of MSA versus PPI in a randomized trial. One hundred fifty-two patients with moderate to severe regurgitation symptoms across twenty-one U.S. clinical sites were randomized into two groups. Additional inclusion criteria for the participants were once daily PPIs for at least eight weeks, body mass index < 35 kg/m², abnormal pH testing (DeMeester score < 4), hiatal hernia < 3 cm by endoscopy and absence of Barrett's esophagus or Los Angeles Classification Grade C or D esophagitis. Participants were assessed at six and 12 months with the Reflux Disease Questionnaire (RDQ) and the GERD Health Related Quality of Life (GERD-HRQL) standard assessments along with specific questions concerning bloating, diarrhea, flatulence, and medication use. One group (n = 102) received PPI (20 mg of omeprazole twice daily) and the other group (n = 50) received laparoscopic MSA. The authors found that MSA controlled regurgitation in 96% of patients versus only 19% of patients receiving PPIs reported control of regurgitation. The regurgitation had been sustained over 12 months. The second portion of the study allowed eligible patients (39%) from the PPI group to crossover and receive the laparoscopic MSA if they had not demonstrated improvement with the twice daily medication. The authors concluded MSA is an effective surgical treatment option for patients with medically refractory regurgitative GERD. The study is limited by limited follow-up.

Ferrari et al. (2020) followed a cohort of 124 individuals who underwent laparoscopic implantation of an MSA device. The goal was to assess the long-term safety and efficacy of the Linx Reflux Management System for 6-12 years. Prior to surgery, all patients completed a diagnostic assessment that included the GERD-HRQL questionnaire, upper GI endoscopy, barium swallow study, ambulatory esophageal pH monitoring and esophageal manometry. Success was defined as ≥ 50% improvement in the GERDHRQL total score and discontinuation of PPI medication. During follow up, over a five-year period, eight patients (2.4%) required a single endoscopic pneumatic dilation due to persistent dysphagia. Thirty-one patients (9.2%) required removal of the device for various reasons; erosion and regurgitation were the top two reasons with six patients each. The average total GERD-HRQL score decreased from 19.9 (baseline) to 4.01. The authors found eighty-one percent of the patients had a successful clinical outcome and were able to discontinue their PPI use. Long-term results in thirty-two patients past 10 years found zero dysphagia, seven individuals with occasional PPI use and only three with daily PPI use. The total overall patient satisfaction rate was 92.5%. The authors concluded MSA allows control of GERD symptoms and improvement in patient quality of life without significant safety issues. However, it was also concluded that additional RCTs could provide more

definitive conclusions. Limitations included no comparison group and possible selection bias with large loss to follow up over time.

Schizas et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review to investigate the safety and efficacy of the LINX® Reflux Management System. After screening 614 articles, a total of 35 studies fit the criteria and were analyzed. According to the authors, although laparoscopic fundoplication (LF) and magnetic sphincter augmentation (MSA) both appear to be safe and effective procedures, MSA appears to have a few distinct advantages such as a less technical procedure, less bloating and superiority in the ability to vomit/belch, easily reversible and if it fails, LF is still a viable option after device removal. The authors' findings suggested that MSA with the LINX device is a safe procedure and has the potential to bridge the treatment gap between maxed out medical treatment and laparoscopic fundoplication. The authors also concluded that further studies with longer follow-up are needed. (Asti (2016), Desart (2015), Reynolds (2015), and Bonavina (2008 and 2010) previously cited in this policy are included in this systematic review.)

A prospective, multicenter, randomized control trial was conducted by Bell et al. (2019, included in the ECRI report) comparing magnetic sphincter augmentation (MSA) (n=50) to double-dose proton-pump inhibitor (PPI) therapy (omeprazole, 20 mg, twice a day) (n=102). The goal of the study was to compare the effect of the two treatments for elimination of moderate to severe regurgitation. As reported on a foregut symptom questionnaire, at six months, 89% of patients treated with MSA reported relief of regurgitation, with 81% reporting $\geq 50\%$ improvement in GERD-health-related quality of life scores. Ten percent of the PPI group reported relief of regurgitation with eight percent of the PPI group reporting $\geq 50\%$ improvement in GERD-health-related quality of life scores. However, 28 percent of MSA patients reported transient dysphagia, with 4% reporting ongoing dysphagia. The authors concluded that patients who continue to experience moderate to severe regurgitation despite PPI treatment should be considered for MSA. Randomized controlled trials with larger patient populations and long term follow up are needed to further assess the long-term safety and efficacy of MSA.

Louie et al. (2018, included in the Schizas et al. (2020) systematic review above) reported one-year results from a mandated post-approval multicenter, prospective case series of 200 patients with pathologic acid reflux confirmed by esophageal pH testing, who underwent magnetic sphincter augmentation (MSA). Predefined clinical outcomes were assessed at the annual visit including a validated, disease-specific questionnaire, esophagogastroduodenoscopy (EGD) and esophageal pH monitoring, and use of proton pump inhibitors. At one year, the mean total acid exposure time decreased from 10.0% at baseline to 3.6%, and 74.4% of patients had normal esophageal acid exposure time (% time pH $\leq 4 \leq 5.3\%$). GERD Health-Related Quality of Life scores improved from a median score of 26.0 at baseline to 4.0 at one year, with 84% of patients meeting the predefined success criteria of at least a 50% reduction in total GERD Health-Related Quality of Life score compared with baseline. The device removal rate at one year was 2.5%. There was a report of one erosion, and no serious adverse events were reported. Although the authors conclude that safety and effectiveness of MSA has been demonstrated outside of an investigational setting, study limitations include lack of contemporaneous comparison group receiving a different GERD treatment and relatively short follow-up period.

In a retrospective observational study, Warren et al. (2018, included in the Schizas et al. (2020) systematic review above) analyzed factors influencing the outcome of MSA for chronic GERD using data from a pivotal trial (n = 99) and the authors prospectively maintained esophageal database (n = 71). A priori outcomes were defined as excellent (GERD-HRQL < 5, no PPI, no esophagitis), good (GERD-HRQL 6-15, no PPI, grade A esophagitis), fair (GERD-HRQL 16 to 25, PPI use, grade B esophagitis), and poor (GERD-HRQL > 25, PPI use, grade C/D esophagitis). Univariable and multivariable logistic regression analyses were performed to determine predictors of achieving an excellent/good outcome. A total of 170 patients underwent MSA with a median age of 53 years, [43-60] and a median BMI of 27 (IQR = 24-30). At baseline, 93.5% of patients experienced typical symptoms and 69% atypical symptoms. At univariable analysis, excellent/good outcomes were negatively impacted by BMI, preoperative LES residual pressure, Hill grade, and hiatal hernia. At multivariable analysis, BMI >35 (OR = 0.05, 0.003-0.78, p = 0.03), structurally defective LES (OR = 0.37, 0.13-0.99, p = 0.05), and preoperative LES residual pressure (OR = 0.89, 0.80-0.98, p = 0.02) were independent negative predictors of excellent/good outcome. The authors' conclusion is that MSA results in excellent/good outcomes in most patients but a higher BMI, structurally defective sphincter, and elevated LES residual pressure may prevent this goal. The authors' conclusion is that a higher BMI, structurally defective sphincter, and elevated LES residual pressure may prevent optimal treatment with MSA. The findings however do not provide evidence for the safety and efficacy of MSA compared to other therapeutic approaches.

Aiolfi et al. (2018, included in the Schizas et al. (2020) systematic review above) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of early results of MSA versus fundoplication for the treatment of GERD. Seven observational cohort studies, published

between 2014 and 2017, matched the inclusion criteria. Overall, 1,211 patients, 686 MSA and 525 LF, were included. Postoperative morbidity ranged from 0 to 3% in the MSA group and from 0 to 7% in the LF group, and there was no mortality. Dysphagia requiring endoscopic dilatation occurred in 9.3% and 6.6% of patients respectively (OR = 1.56, 95% CI = 0.61-3.95, $p = 0.119$). The pooled OR of gas/bloat symptoms, ability to vomit, and ability to belch were 0.39 (95% CI 0.25-0.61; $p < 0.001$), 10.10 (95% CI 5.33-19.15; $p < 0.001$), and 5.53 (95% CI 3.73-8.19; $p < 0.001$), respectively. The postoperative GERD-HRQL was similar ($p = 0.101$). The pooled OR of PPI suspension, endoscopic dilation, and reoperation were similar in the two patients' groups ($p = 0.548$, $p = 0.119$, $p = 0.183$, respectively). The authors concluded that both anti-reflux procedures are safe and effective up to one-year follow-up. PPI suspension rate, dysphagia requiring endoscopic dilatation, and disease-related quality of life are similar in the two patient groups. MSA is associated with less gas/bloat symptoms and increased ability to vomit and belch. The findings are limited by inclusion of observational studies only and relatively short follow-up periods.

Alicuben et al. (2018, included in the Schizas et al. (2020) systematic review above) reported on the worldwide experience with erosion of the MSA device in a large case series. In total, 9,453 devices were placed and there were 29 reported cases of erosions. The median time to presentation of an erosion was 26 months with most occurring between one and four years after placement. The risk of erosion was 0.3% at four years after device implantation. Most patients experienced new-onset dysphagia prompting evaluation. Devices were successfully removed in all patients most commonly via an endoscopic removal of the eroded portion followed by a delayed laparoscopic removal of the remaining beads. At a median follow-up of 58 days post-removal, there were no complications and 24 patients have returned to baseline. Four patients reported ongoing mild dysphagia. The authors concluded that erosion of the LINX device is an important but rare complication to recognize that has been managed via minimally invasive approaches without long-term consequences. Continued monitoring and reporting of MSA erosion will provide longer-term experience.

In a systematic review and meta-analysis of the LINX[®] magnetic esophageal sphincter augmentation versus Nissen fundoplication for gastroesophageal reflux disease, Skubleny et al. (2017) included randomized controlled trials, non-randomized comparison study and case series with greater than five patients. Five hundred and forty-seven titles were identified through primary search, and 197 titles or abstracts were screened after removing duplicates. Meta-analysis was performed on postoperative quality of life outcomes, procedural efficacy, and patient procedural satisfaction. Three primary studies identified a total of 688 patients, of whom 273 and 415 underwent Nissen fundoplication and MSA, respectively. MSA was statistically superior to LNF in preserving patient's ability to belch (95.2 vs. 65.9%, $p < 0.00001$) and ability to emesis (93.5 vs. 49.5%, $p < 0.0001$). There was no statistically significant difference between MSA and LNF in gas/bloating (26.7 vs. 53.4%, $p = 0.06$), postoperative dysphagia (33.9 vs. 47.1%, $p = 0.43$) and proton pump inhibitor (PPI) elimination (81.4 vs 81.5%, $p = 0.68$). The authors' conclusion is that magnetic sphincter augmentation appears to be an effective treatment for GERD with short-term outcomes comparable to the more technically challenging and time-consuming Nissen fundoplication. The authors also concluded that long-term comparative outcome data past one year is needed in order to further understand the efficacy of magnetic sphincter augmentation.

Warren et al. (2017) conducted a retrospective case series to evaluate the manometric changes, function, and impact of magnetic sphincter augmentation (MSA) on the lower esophageal sphincter (LES). Inclusion criteria ($n = 121$) consisted of a confirmed diagnosis of gastroesophageal reflux disease by an abnormal esophageal pH study (body mass index $< 35\text{kg/m}^2$, hiatal hernia $< 3\text{cm}$, and absence of endoscopic Barrett disease). Manometric changes, pH testing, and proton pump inhibitor use were assessed preoperatively and six and 12 months after MSA. MSA was associated with an overall increase in the median LES resting pressure (18 pre-MSA vs. 23mm Hg post-MSA; $p = 0.0003$), residual pressure (4 vs. 9mm Hg; $p < 0.0001$), and distal esophageal contraction amplitude (80 vs. 90mm Hg; $p = 0.02$). The percent peristalsis remained unaltered (94% vs. 87%; $p = 0.71$). Overall, patients with a manometrically defective LES were restored 67% of the time to a normal sphincter with MSA. Those with a structurally defective or severely defective LES improved to a normal LES in 77% and 56% of patients, respectively. Only 18% of patients with a normal preoperative manometric LES deteriorated to a lower category. The authors concluded that a manometrically defective LES can be restored to normal sphincter, whereas a normal LES remains stable. The study is limited by lack of comparison group receiving other treatment for GERD.

Smith et al. (2017) reported that out of a total of 3283 procedures reviewed for MSAD, device removal occurred in 2.7% of cases. The most common causes of removal were dysphagia, continued reflux, and device erosion into the esophagus. Salvador et al. (2017), Parmar et al. (2017), and Lipham, et al. (2015), report similar findings.

Ganz et al. (2016, included in the Schizas et al. (2020) and Zhuang et al. (2021) systematic reviews above) reported in a case series the five-year follow-up evaluation of patients who received a magnetic sphincter augmentation (MSA) device for GERD.

The original prospective study at 14 centers in the United States and the Netherlands was conducted on 100 adults with GERD for six months or more, who were partially responsive to daily proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) and had evidence of pathologic esophageal acid exposure. At baseline, the median GERD-HRQL scores were 27 in patients not taking PPIs and 11 in patients on PPIs; five years after device placement this score decreased to four. All patients used PPIs at baseline; this value decreased to 15.3% at five years. Moderate or severe regurgitation occurred in 57% of subjects at baseline, but only 1.2% at five years. All patients reported the ability to belch and vomit if needed. Bothersome dysphagia was present in 5% at baseline and in 6% at five years. Bothersome gas-bloat was present in 52% at baseline and decreased to 8.3% at five years. The authors concluded that MSA provides significant and sustained control of reflux, with minimal side effects or complications, which in their opinion validates the long-term safety and efficacy of MSA for patients with GERD. The study is however limited by lack of comparison group.

Reigler et al. (2015, included in the Hayes report) evaluated using a retrospective cohort study design the evidence for magnetic sphincter augmentation device (MSAD) and laparoscopic fundoplication (LF) in clinical practice. Two hundred forty-nine patients (202 MSAD patients and 47 LF patients) had completed one-year follow-up. The LF group was older and had a greater frequency of large hiatal hernias and Barrett's esophagus than the MSAD group ($P < 0.001$). The median GERD-health related quality of life score improved from 20.0 to 3.0 after MSAD and 23.0 to 3.5 after LF. Moderate or severe regurgitation improved from 58.2 to 3.1% after MSAD and 60.0 to 13.0% after LF ($p = 0.014$). Discontinuation of PPIs was achieved by 81.8% of patients after MSAD and 63.0% after LF ($p = 0.009$). Excessive gas and abdominal bloating were reported by 10.0% of patients after MSAD and 31.9% following LF ($p \leq 0.001$). Following MSAD, 91.3% of patients were able to vomit if needed, compared with 44.4% of those undergoing LF ($p < 0.001$). Reoperation rate was 4.0% following MSAD and 6.4% following LF. The authors conveyed that antireflux surgery should be individualized to the characteristics of each patient, taking into consideration anatomy and propensity and tolerance of side effects. They concluded that both MSAD and LF showed significant improvements in reflux control, with similar safety and reoperation rates. In their opinion, in the treatment continuum of antireflux surgery, MSAD should be considered as a first-line surgical option in appropriately selected patients without Barrett's esophagus or a large hiatal hernia in order to avoid unnecessary dissection and preserve the patient's native gastric anatomy. The study is however limited by lack of randomization.

Lipham et al. (2015) conducted a case series of antireflux surgery with a Magnetic Sphincter Augmentation Device (MSAD). The aim of the study was to examine the safety profile of the MSAD in the first 1,000 implanted patients. The author compiled data from multiple sources starting on July 1, 2013. The analysis included intra/perioperative complications, hospital readmissions, procedure-related interventions, reoperations, and device malfunctions leading to injury or inability to complete the procedure. The authors report that approximately 1,000 patients worldwide have been implanted with the MSAD, at 82 institutions with median implant duration of 274 days. They concluded that the safety analysis of the first 1,000 patients treated with MSAD for gastroesophageal reflux disease confirms the safety of this device and the implantation technique. The preliminary and positive results of this study are hampered by lack of an adequate comparator group.

Clinical Practice Guidelines

American Gastroenterological Association (AGA)

In a position statement published in 2008, the AGA assigned a grade of "Insufficient" regarding the use of current and commercially available endoluminal antireflux procedures for the management of patients with an esophageal syndrome. The AGA provides no recommendation since there is insufficient evidence to recommend for or against its use (Kahrilas et al., 2008).

American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE)

In a 2015 clinical guideline on the role of endoscopy in the management of GERD, ASGE suggests that endoscopic antireflux therapy be considered for selected patients with uncomplicated GERD after careful discussion with the patient regarding potential adverse effects, benefits, and other available therapeutic options.

American College of Gastroenterology (ACG)

In a 2021 ACG published clinical guideline (Katz, et al. 2021) for the diagnosis and management of GERD, the following recommendations are cited:

- Recommend antireflux surgery as an option for long-term treatment of patients with objective evidence of GERD, (strong recommendation; moderate level of evidence)

- Recommend consideration of magnetic sphincter augmentation (MSA) as an alternative to laparoscopic fundoplication for patients with regurgitation who fail medical management (strong recommendation, moderate level of evidence)
- Consideration of transoral incisionless fundoplication (TIF) for patients with troublesome regurgitation or heartburn who do not wish to undergo antireflux surgery and who do not have severe reflux esophagitis or hiatal hernias (conditional recommendation; low level of evidence)
- Do not recommend radiofrequency energy (Stretta) as an antireflux procedure due to inconsistent data on the efficacy of the device (conditional recommendation; low level of evidence)

American Society of General Surgeons (ASGS)

In 2014, the ASGS published a position statement regarding its support for the LINX procedure. ASGS states that total management of GERD will likely rely upon a combination of medical and surgical care in the current and near future. ASGS recommends that when considering a surgical procedure, the procedure will need to provide safe control of GERD with minimal side effects. The ASGS states, “Based on currently available information and the experience of our members with the procedure, we do support the LINX procedure as a mechanism for controlling GERD when it is placed by properly trained laparoscopic surgeons with experience in foregut surgery and the management of GERD patients.”

In April 2011, the ASGS published a position statement regarding the use of TIF stating that it supports the use of TIF in patients with symptomatic chronic GERD who are not responsive to a standard dose of PPI therapy (ASGS, 2011). The ASGS also supports its use for patients who wish to avoid lifetime drug therapy for this condition. The ASGS also supports the adoption of the procedure by trained general surgeons as a less invasive alternative to more conventional surgical techniques, stating that the preferred surgical technique should be based on the discretion and judgment of the surgeon and the patient’s clinical circumstances.

In a statement regarding coverage for TIF, ASGS states that there is a sufficient body of peer reviewed literature that establishes transoral fundoplication as reasonable and medically necessary for a subset of patients who are candidates for surgical fundoplication; specifically, patients who either cannot obtain satisfactory relief from standard PPI therapy or who wish to avoid a lifetime of dependence on such medications, and present with a 2 centimeter or smaller hiatal hernia (ASGS, 2011).

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) encourages further research into laparoscopic insertion of a magnetic titanium ring for GERD, including long-term outcome data and comparative trials with other anti-reflux surgery. Their recommendations do not identify any major safety concerns with this procedure (NICE, 2017).

The NICE guideline on endoscopic radiofrequency ablation for GERD considers the evidence on this procedure to be adequate in the short and medium term but there is uncertainty about longer-term outcomes. Regarding efficacy, there is evidence of symptomatic relief but objective evidence on reduction of reflux is inconclusive (NICE, 2013).

Society of American Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)

In an updated review of endoluminal treatments for the treatment of GERD, SAGES (Stefanidis et al., 2017b) provided the following recommendations:

- Based on existing evidence, TIF can be performed with an acceptable safety risk in appropriately selected patients. The procedure leads to better control of GERD symptoms compared with PPI treatment in the short term (six months) but appears to lose effectiveness during longer term follow-up and is associated with moderate patient satisfaction scores. Objective GERD measures improve similarly after TIF 2.0 compared with PPI. No comparative, controlled trials exist between TIF and surgical fundoplication, but preliminary evidence suggests that the latter can be used safely after TIF failure. (Level of evidence +++, strong recommendation)
- Based on existing evidence, Stretta significantly improves health related quality of life score, heartburn scores, the incidence of esophagitis, and esophageal acid exposure in patients with GERD, but does not increase lower esophageal sphincter basal pressure. In addition, it decreases the use of PPI by approximately 50%. The effectiveness of the procedure diminishes some over time, but persistent effects have been described up to 10 years after the procedure in appropriately selected patients with GERD. Stretta is more effective than PPI, but less so than fundoplication. Stretta is safe in adults and has a short learning curve. (Level of evidence +++, strong recommendation)

The SAGES Technology and Value Assessment Committee (TVAC) updated its safety and effectiveness analysis of the LINX Reflux Management System.

- Review of published studies suggests that magnetic sphincter augmentation is safe with no reported deaths and a 0.1% rate of intra/perioperative complications.
- Long-term efficacy of LINX appears good for typical GERD symptoms with reduced acid exposure, improved GERD symptoms, and freedom from PPI in 85-88% at three to five years.
- Dysphagia resolves in most patients and the incidence is roughly 10% at one year and 4% at three years. The need for endoscopic dilation ranges from 6-12% and the primary reason for explantation appears to be persistent dysphagia with a rate in larger series from 3-6%.
- Erosion appears to be rare, with one case reported in the first 1,000 patients, one additional published case report, a large series reporting two erosions, and several additional reports in the FDA MAUDE dataset (true number unknown, as multiple entries in this dataset may be made for each patient). Based on very limited literature, erosion can be successfully treated with explantation (Telem et al., 2017).

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

This section is to be used for informational purposes only. FDA approval alone is not a basis for coverage.

Several endoscopic antireflux (endoluminal) devices have received approval by the FDA for treatment of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

The Stretta System (Mederi Therapeutics) was approved in April 2000 for radiofrequency thermal ablation treatment of GERD. Additional information is available at: http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/cdrh_docs/pdf10/k103017.pdf. (Accessed July 12, 2022)

The Bard EndoCinch Endoscopic Suturing System (Bard Endoscopic Technologies, Billerica, MA, a subsidiary of C.R. Bard Inc), was approved in January 2001 for endoscopic suturing in the treatment of GERD. Subsequent FDA approval was received in September 2007 for an updated version. Additional information is available at: http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/cdrh_docs/pdf7/k071651.pdf. (Accessed July 12, 2022)

The NDO Surgical Endoscopic Plication System was approved in September 2007 for endoscopic suturing in the treatment of GERD in patients who require and respond to pharmacological therapy. Additional information is available at: http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/cdrh_docs/pdf7/k071651.pdf. (Accessed July 12, 2022)

The current generation of EsophyX, EsophyX2, was cleared for marketing as substantially equivalent to the original EsophyX system with minor changes in November 2009 under the FDA510(k) process. The original system was cleared for marketing in September 2007 as substantially equivalent to the predicate devices NDO Surgical Endoscopic Plication System, Bard EndoCinch, and EGS StomaphyX Endoluminal Fasteners and Delivery System. According to the approval summary letter, EsophyX2 is indicated for:

- Use in transoral tissue approximation
- Full-thickness plication and ligation in the GI tract
- The treatment of symptomatic chronic gastroesophageal reflux disease in patients who require and respond to pharmacologic therapy
- Narrowing of the gastroesophageal junction
- Reduction of hiatal hernia < 2 cm in patients with symptomatic chronic gastroesophageal reflux disease

See the following websites for more information:

- http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/cdrh_docs/pdf7/K071651.pdf
- <http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPMN/pmn.cfm?db=PMN&id=k092400>

(Accessed July 12, 2022)

The Medigus Ultrasound Surgical Endostapler (MUSE™ System) received 510K approval on January 15, 2015 for the endoscopic placement of surgical staples in the soft tissue of the esophagus and stomach in order to create anterior partial fundoplication for treatment of symptomatic chronic GERD in patients who require and respond to pharmacological therapy.

See the following website for additional information: https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/cdrh_docs/pdf14/k143634.pdf. (Accessed July 12, 2022)

These products are Class II devices (moderate risk) deemed substantially equivalent to other endoscopic devices utilizing other procedures.

Torax Medical obtained FDA premarket approval (PMA) in March 2012 for the LINX Reflux Management System. Additional approvals for PMA supplements can be found on the FDA website. See the following website for more information using PMA number P100049: <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPMA/pma.cfm>. (Accessed July 12, 2022)

Durasphere is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as an injectable bulking agent for gastro-urology use in the treatment of adult women with stress urinary incontinence due to intrinsic sphincter deficiency. Use of this product for esophageal reflux would be considered off-label use. See the following website for more information, using PMA number P980053: <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfPMA/pma.cfm>. (Accessed July 12, 2022)

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Policy History/Revision Information

Date	Summary of Changes
02/01/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Medical Policy

Instructions for Use

This Medical Policy provides assistance in interpreting UnitedHealthcare standard benefit plans. When deciding coverage, the federal, state (Ohio Administrative Code [OAC]) or contractual requirements for benefit plan coverage must be referenced as the terms of the federal, state (OAC) or contractual requirements for benefit plan coverage may differ from the standard benefit plan. In the event of a conflict, the federal, state (OAC) or contractual requirements for benefit plan coverage govern. Before using this policy, please check the federal, state (OAC) or contractual requirements for benefit plan coverage. UnitedHealthcare reserves the right to modify its Policies and Guidelines as necessary. This Medical Policy is provided for informational purposes. It does not constitute medical advice.

UnitedHealthcare uses InterQual® for the primary medical/surgical criteria, and the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) for substance use, in administering health benefits. If InterQual® does not have applicable criteria, UnitedHealthcare may also use UnitedHealthcare Medical Policies, Coverage Determination Guidelines, and/or Utilization Review Guidelines that have been approved by the Ohio Department for Medicaid Services. The UnitedHealthcare Medical Policies, Coverage Determination Guidelines, and Utilization Review Guidelines are intended to be used in connection with the independent professional medical judgment of a qualified health care provider and do not constitute the practice of medicine or medical advice.