



INSURANCE COVERAGE

Medicare Makes a Pitch for Acupuncture

Editorial Staff

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) have taken notice of acupuncture's relevance in pain management. A new proposal will cover acupuncture for Medicare patients with chronic low back pain, who are enrolled participants either in clinical trials sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), or in CMS-approved studies.

CMS has been collaborating with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as part of the Opioids Workgroup and Evidence Generation Workgroup to launch studies on acupuncture for the treatment of chronic low back pain in adults 65 years of age and older.

The NIH & CMS Are Working Together

Their news release states, "CMS will continue its collaboration with NIH to further develop evidence to inform future Medicare coverage determinations for acupuncture treatment for beneficiaries with chronic low back pain."



CMS Principal Deputy Administrator of Operations and Policy, Kimberly Brandt, said "Chronic low back pain impacts many Medicare patients and is a leading reason for opioid prescribing. The proposed decision would provide Medicare patients who suffer from chronic low back pain with access to a non-pharmacologic treatment option and could help reduce reliance on prescription opioids. CMS will work closely with our sister agencies to monitor outcomes for Medicare beneficiaries receiving acupuncture to inform our understanding of the efficacy of this therapeutic approach."

Advocacy Works

The NCCAOM added, "We would like to commend the CMS for evaluating and considering the NCCAOM and ASA's collaborative letter and comments in response to the Centers' National Coverage Analysis for acupuncture in the treatment of chronic low back pain," stated NCCAOM Board Chair Afua Bromley. "We believe CMS's July 15 announcement shows that our advocacy efforts have helped strengthen the case for recognition."

Although this proposal is for one study (low back pain), one can anticipate that more coverage will follow once the outcomes have been measured. For more information please visit:

<https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/details/nca-tracking-sheet.aspx?NCAId=295>.

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