

January 2015

**Know Your MAC:  
Different MAC's May Have Different Policies**

As a healthcare provider offering Medicare services, it is important to know who serves as your regional Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC). The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) established MACs as “*multi-state, regional contractors responsible for administering both Medicare Part A and Medicare Part B claims.*” In addition to processing Medicare claims, MACs also serve as the primary point of contact for provider enrollment, provider training, receipt, processing, and payment of fee-for-service claims. Applicable to anesthesiologists and pain medicine physicians, MACs also play an important role in providing information and guidelines for Medicare coverage and billing requirements for healthcare services—such as with recent Local Coverage Determinations (LCD) for facet joint injections.

One of the MACs, Noridian Administrative Services LLC, has proposed a policy change to the “Coverage Indications, Limitations, and/or Medical Necessity” for the LCD, “Facet Joint Injections, Medial Branch Blocks, and Facet Joint Radiofrequency Neurotomy.” Facet joint injection techniques are used in the diagnosis and/or treatment of chronic neck and back pain. However, determining its clinical effectiveness is not concrete in medical literature. Therefore, continual coverage requires reporting as described in the mentioned LCD.

*NOTE: In reference to this policy, a facet joint level refers to the zygapophyseal joint or the two medial branch nerves innervating that zygapophyseal joint.*

The updated *coverage indications* for facet joint injections from the Noridian LCD require:

- Patient must have history of at least 3 months of moderate to severe pain with functional impairment and pain is inadequately responsive to conservative care such as NSAIDs, acetaminophen, physical therapy (as tolerated).
- Pain is predominantly axial and, with the possible exception of facet joint cysts, not associated with radiculopathy or neurogenic claudication.
- There is no non-facet pathology that could explain the source of the patient’s pain, such as fracture, tumor, infection, or significant deformity.
- Clinical assessment implicates the facet joint as the putative source of pain.

## Timely Topics

### PAYMENT AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

The updated *limitations of coverage* require:

- A maximum of five (5) facet joint injection sessions inclusive of medial branch blocks, intraarticular injections, facet cyst rupture and RF ablations may be performed per year in the cervical/thoracic spine and five (5) in the lumbar spine.
- For each covered spinal region (cervical/thoracic or lumbar), no more than two (2) thermal RF sessions will be reimbursed in any calendar year, involving no more than four (4) joints per session, e.g., two (2) bilateral levels or four (4) unilateral levels.
- Neither conscious sedation nor Monitored Anesthesia Care (MAC) is routinely necessary for intraarticular facet joint injections or medial branch blocks and are not routinely reimbursable.
- Individual consideration may be given for payment in rare unique circumstances if the medical necessity of sedation is unequivocal and clearly documented.
- Non-thermal RF modalities for facet joint denervation including chemical, low grade thermal energy (<80 degrees Celsius), as well as pulsed RF are not covered.
- Intraarticular and/or extraarticular facet joint prolotherapy is not covered.

REVISION HISTORY DATE	REVISION HISTORY NUMBER	REVISION HISTORY EXPLANATION	REASON(S) FOR CHANGE
03/05/2014	R2	Added 723.8* Use for Occipital headache with CPT 64490 only in the ICD-9-CM Codes that Support Medical Necessity section. The effective date remains the same.	Revisions Due To ICD-9-CM Code Changes
03/05/2014	R1	Revisions made to the "Coverage Indications, Limitations and/or Medical Necessity" & "Bill Type Codes" sections.	Other

Knowing who your MAC is and staying up-to-date with current LCDs for your particular jurisdiction are essential. As an example, this particular Noridian LCD already had two revisions made to it earlier this year:

**Noridian:** [SUPERSEDED Local Coverage Determination \(LCD\):Facet Joint Injections, Medial Branch Blocks, and Facet Joint Radiofrequency Neurotomy \(L33842\)](#)

## Timely Topics

### PAYMENT AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Local coverage determinations are constantly being created and updated. It is important to not only know your MAC to stay current on its policies, but because various jurisdictions have different coverage policies for the same procedures and/or services. In the instance of facet joint injections, the contractor Novitas Solutions, INC. uses different coverage indications and limitations for coverage in comparison to Noridian:

The updated *coverage indications* for facet joint injections from the Novitas LCD require:

Medicare will consider facet joint blocks to be reasonable and necessary for chronic pain (persistent pain for three (3) months or greater) suspected to originate from the facet joint. Hallmarks of posterior element biomechanical pain are as follows:

- The pain does not have a strong radicular component.
- There is no associated neurological deficit and the pain is aggravated by hyperextension, rotation or lateral bending of the spine, depending on the orientation of the facet joint at that level.

The updated *limitations of coverage* require:

Medicare does not expect that an epidural block or sympathetic block would be provided to a patient on the same day as facet joint injections. Multiple blocks on same day could lead to improper or lack of diagnosis. Coverage will be extended for only one type of procedure during one day/session of treatment unless the patient has recently discontinued anticoagulant therapy for the purpose of interventional pain management.

**Novitas Solutions:** [SUPERSEDED Local Coverage Determination \(LCD\): Facet Joint Injections \(L32707\)](#)

In the absence of a national policy, it is important to know and follow the policies in effect for your MAC. MACs are a valuable source of news and information regarding Medicare updates and policies within your specific region. Through their electronic listservs, your MAC can quickly provide you with information pertinent to your geographic location—including LCDs.

The chart below lets you know which MAC administers the Medicare program for your practice and provides you links to find for updates and news specific to your region. Visit your local contractor's website to sign up for their listserv or e-mailing list.

## Timely Topics

### PAYMENT AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

#### **Medicare Administrative Contractors (MAC)**

<b>Contractor</b>	<b>Jurisdictions</b>	<b>States</b>	<b>Website</b>
Cahaba Government Benefit Administrators, LLC	J10	AL, GA, TN	<a href="http://www.cahabagba.com/">http://www.cahabagba.com/</a>
CGS Administrators, LLC	J15	KY, OH	<a href="https://www.cgsmedicare.com/">https://www.cgsmedicare.com/</a>
First Coast Service Options, Inc.	J9	FL, PR, VI	<a href="http://www.fcso.com/">http://www.fcso.com/</a>
National Government Services, Inc.	J6, JK	MN, WI, IL, NY, CT, MA, RI, VT, ME, NH	<a href="http://www.ngsmedicare.com/ngs/portal/ngsmedicare/home">http://www.ngsmedicare.com/ngs/portal/ngsmedicare/home</a>
Noridian Healthcare Solutions, LLC	JF, JE	CA, HI, NV, AK, AZ, ID, MT, ND, OR, SD, UT, WA, WY	<a href="https://www.noridianmedicare.com/">https://www.noridianmedicare.com/</a>
Novitas Solutions, Inc.	JL, JH	AR, CO, LA, MS, NM, OK, TX, DE, MD, PA, NJ, DC	<a href="http://www.novitas-solutions.com/">www.novitas-solutions.com/</a>
Palmetto GBA	J1, J11	NC, SC, VA, WV	<a href="http://www.palmettogba.com/palmetto/palmetto.nsf/SiteHome?ReadForm">http://www.palmettogba.com/palmetto/palmetto.nsf/SiteHome?ReadForm</a>
Wisconsin Physicians Service Insurance Corporation	J5, J8, T18	IA, KS, MO, NE, IN, MI	<a href="http://www.wpsmedicare.com/index.shtml">http://www.wpsmedicare.com/index.shtml</a>

For more information on MACs and what an LCD is and how it can be accessed, please visit the Payment and Practice Management Department's Timely Topics Article [Carrier Advisory Committee \(CAC\) 101](#)