

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services



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MLN Matters® Number: MM9281

Related Change Request (CR) #: CR 9281

Related CR Release Date: August 21, 2015

Effective Date: July 29, 2015

Related CR Transmittal #: R184NCD

Implementation Date: September 21, 2015

Update to Pub. 100-03, National Coverage Determination Manual, Chapter 1, Part 1, Section 50.1 Speech Generating Device

Provider Types Affected

This MLN Matters® Article is intended for physicians, other providers, and suppliers who submit claims to Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs) including Durable Medical Equipment MACs (DME MACs), and Home Health and Hospice MACs, for services provided to Medicare beneficiaries.

Provider Action Needed

Change Request (CR) 9281 updates the Medicare “National Coverage Determinations Manual” to add a revised scope of benefit National Coverage Determination (NCD) for Speech Generating Devices (SGDs) covered under the Medicare benefit category for Durable Medical Equipment (DME). Please make sure that your billing staff are aware of these changes.

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Background

Key information in the revised NCD in Chapter 1 of the Manual is as follows:

SGDs are considered to fall within the Durable Medical Equipment (DME) benefit category established by Section 1861(n) of the Social Security Act. They are covered for patients who suffer from a severe speech impairment and have a medical condition that warrants the use of a device based on the following definitions.

SGDs are defined as DME that provide an individual who has a severe speech impairment with the ability to meet his or her functional, speaking needs. Speech Generating Devices are devices or software that generate speech and are used solely by the individual who has a severe speech impairment. The speech is generated using one of the following methods:

- digitized audible/verbal speech output, using prerecorded messages;
- synthesized audible/verbal speech output which requires message formulation by spelling and device access by physical contact with the device-direct selection techniques;
- synthesized audible/verbal speech output which permits multiple methods of message formulation and multiple methods of device access; or
- software that allows a computer or other electronic device to generate audible/verbal speech.

Other covered features of the device include the capability to generate email, text, or phone messages to allow the patient to “speak” or communicate remotely, as well as the capability to download updates to the covered features of the device from the manufacturer or supplier of the device.

If an SGD is limited to use by a patient with a severe speech impairment and is primarily used for the purpose of generating speech, it is not necessary for the device to be dedicated only to audible/verbal speech output to be considered DME. Computers and tablets are generally not considered DME because they are useful in the absence of an illness or injury.

Nationally Non-Covered Indications

Internet or phone services or any modification to a patient’s home to allow use of the SGD are not covered by Medicare because such services or modifications could be used for non-medical equipment such as standard phones or personal computers. In addition, specific features of an SGD that are not used by the individual who has a severe speech impairment to meet his or her functional speaking needs are not covered. This would include any computing hardware or software not necessary to allow for generation of speech, email, text or phone messages, such as hardware or software used to create documents and spreadsheets or play games or music, and any other function a computer can perform that is not directly related to meeting the functional speaking communication needs of the patient, including video communications or conferencing. These features of a speech generating device do not fall

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within the scope of Section 1861(n) of the Social Security Act and the cost of these features are the responsibility of the beneficiary. Suppliers of SGDs are encouraged to furnish the beneficiary with a voluntary Advance Beneficiary Notice (ABN) which informs that these features are not covered by Medicare and the beneficiary is liable for the expense of these features.

Other

MACs acting within their respective jurisdictions have discretion to cover or not cover speech generating devices based on their individual reasonable and necessary determinations.

Additional Information

The official instruction, CR9281, issued to your MAC regarding this change is available at <https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Transmittals/Downloads/R184NCD.pdf> on the CMS website. The revised portion of the NCD Manual is part of CR9281.

If you have any questions, please contact your MAC at their toll-free number. That number is available at <http://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Medicare-Learning-Network-MLN/MLNMattersArticles/index.html> under - How Does It Work

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