



Dispensing Compression Garments for Lymphedema

These items are now covered by Medicare.

BY JEFFREY LEHRMAN, DPM

Lymphedema can be a crippling and painful disease if not appropriately addressed. The good news is that providers can dispense compression garments for lymphedema that are covered by Medicare, even in absence of an open ulcer.

Lymphedema

Lymphedema is the result of an abnormal accumulation of lymph fluid. This typically results from damaged lymph vessels and/or lymph nodes. When an excess of lymph fluid accumulates, it results in swelling that most commonly affects the extremities, but it can occur anywhere in the body. This swelling can occur either gradually over time or more suddenly. The skin in the areas where swelling develops can feel tight and heavy. Sometimes, patients who experience this report a tingling sensation in the area of the swelling. The skin in the area(s) of swelling can become thick and/or leathery. As swelling develops, patients may note that their clothes and jewelry do not fit as well.

Complications of Lymphedema

When lymphedema occurs, there is increased risk of infection in the areas where the fluid develops. The edema, combined with compromised

lymphatic function, results in a situation where the cells that prevent and fight infection do not populate the area the way that they should. The combination of the edema and the associated skin changes can result in ulcers of the skin. The excess weight of the fluid can also result in weakness, and stiffness or pain of the

ing lower extremity compression are different for compression used for lymphedema versus compression used for venous leg disease.

Lymphedema Treatment

There is no cure for lymphedema. However, it can be managed when the appropriate tools are employed.

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joints in the area. This can lead to difficulty moving and even disability.

Lymphedema Versus Chronic Venous Insufficiency

While lymphedema is an abnormal accumulation of lymph fluid secondary to impaired function of lymphatic structures, chronic venous insufficiency is an abnormal accumulation of blood secondary to impaired venous function. Lymphedema and chronic venous insufficiency may have some similar symptoms, but they are not synonyms and should not be treated as such. Furthermore, Medicare coverage guidelines regard-

When lymphedema is appropriately managed, the risks of the complications listed above are significantly decreased. A tenet of any lymphedema treatment plan is compression.

Lymphedema Coverage

As of January 1, 2024, compression garments are covered for the treatment of lymphedema in the absence of an open ulcer for Medicare beneficiaries. This change, published in the Calendar Year (CY) 2024 Home Health Prospective Payment System Final Rule (CMS-1780-F), followed advocacy from

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Compression Garments (from page 35)

both provider and patient advocacy groups asking for expanded coverage of compression garments for treating lymphedema.

In order to make this change, a new benefit category was added to the Social Security Act. In making this change, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) acknowledged that “gradient compression garments are effective in reducing and/or preventing progression of lymphedema in the arm and leg” and that gradient compression garments are “effective in maintaining limb circumference.”

According to CMS-1780-F, this Medicare coverage includes compression garments that are:

- Furnished on or after January 1, 2024, to an individual with a diagnosis of lymphedema for the treatment of such condition;
- Primarily and customarily used to serve a medical purpose and for the treatment of lymphedema, as determined by the Secretary; and
- Prescribed by a physician (or a physician assistant, nurse practi-

Coding

With this Medicare coverage, there are now some compression garments that have two different HCPCS codes, where one code is used if the garment is employed for lymphedema and a different code is used when that same garment is employed for

the encounter and should describe the pathology encountered that day. In addition to this statement of medical necessity, the medical record should also contain a detailed history and physical exam that supports the diagnosis of lymphedema when it is present.

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venous leg disease. The HCPCS code that represents the garment most typically used to address lymphedema of the lower extremity is:

HCPCS A6583—Gradient compression wrap with adjustable straps, below knee, each.

Lymphedema Diagnosis Codes

Common ICD-10-CM codes that represent lymphedema include:

- I89.0—Lymphedema, not elsewhere classified
- Q82.0—Hereditary Lymphedema

Other Documentation

These compression garments are durable medical equipment. Therefore, when dispensing these lymphedema compression garments, all other payer criteria for coverage of durable medical equipment must be satisfied. For Medicare beneficiaries, this includes documenting the number of items dispensed, which body part(s) is being addressed, including laterality when appropriate, and the size of the items dispensed. Instructions for use should also be documented, including how the patient was told to use the item and the frequency with which it will be used. Supplier standards and warranty information should be provided to the patient, and the fact that these were provided should be documented. The Proof of Delivery and Standard Written Order requirements must be complete and in the medical record.

Conclusion

Lymphedema is a relatively common condition that usually requires compression. Medicare allows coverage for gradient compression garments used for lymphedema, even in the absence of an open ulcer. **PM**



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tioner, or a clinical nurse specialist (as these terms are defined in section 1861(aa)(5)) to the extent authorized under State law).

Medicare coverage for these compression garments when treating lymphedema now includes up to three medically necessary daytime garments for each affected limb or area of the body every six months. The reason three garments are allowed for each affected limb or area of the body is to allow patients to be wearing one, washing one, and drying one at any given time. The importance of hygiene is stressed in the CMS-1780-F guidance that created this coverage.

I97.2—Postmastectomy Lymphedema Syndrome

I97.89—Other postprocedural complications and disorders of the circulatory system, not elsewhere classified

Documentation

As is the case with any service or product, when a compression garment is dispensed to address lymphedema, the medical necessity of the item must be documented. This includes documenting the pathology being addressed and why the compression garment is medically necessary. This documentation should be specific to the patient treated during