SENSORY STIMULATION FOR COMA PATIENTS
MED205.014

COVERAGE:

Sensory stimulation for coma patients IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR BENEFITS as it is considered investigational.

DESCRIPTION:

Sensory stimulation is intended to promote awakening and enhance the rehabilitative potential of coma patients. Protocols may involve stimulation of any or all of the following senses:

- visual
- auditory
- olfactory
- gustatory
- cutaneous
- kinesthetic.

Various stimuli may be used for each sense. Protocols may differ by who performs the stimulation and where it is performed. Professionals providing the stimulation may include:

- nurses
- occupational therapists
- physical therapists
- speech-language therapists.

In some cases, family members may be trained in the techniques and are given primary responsibility for providing the therapy. Treatment may be delivered in the hospital, the patient's home or a nursing home.

RATIONALE:

This policy is based in part on a 1989 TEC assessment that considered whether there was adequate scientific evidence to determine whether sensory stimulation either led to faster emergence from coma or improved rehabilitative potential. The TEC assessment concluded that to validate the effectiveness of coma stimulation, controlled clinical trials of comparable patients were required. The literature available in 1989 did not meet these criteria; the five identified studies varied greatly in focus, design, methods, and degree of detail in the study's description. Therefore, the TEC assessment concluded that there was inadequate scientific data to permit conclusions regarding the effectiveness of coma stimulation.

A literature search from 1989 to June 1998 did not identify any controlled studies of coma stimulation. The identified studies reported case series or descriptive studies of coma stimulation techniques. In 1991 Wood and colleagues published a critique of coma stimulation that pointed out that the incomplete knowledge regarding information processing in the brain-injured state does not permit a
scientific or theoretical basis of coma stimulation.

DISCLAIMER:

State and federal law, as well as contract language, including definitions and specific inclusions/exclusions, takes precedence over Medical Policy and must be considered first in determining coverage. The member’s contract benefits in effect on the date that services are rendered must be used. Any benefits are subject to the payment of premiums for the date on which services are rendered. Medical technology is constantly evolving, and we reserve the right to review and update Medical Policy periodically. HMO Blue Texas physicians who are contracted/affiliated with a capitated IPA/medical group must contact the IPA/medical group for information regarding HMO claims/reimbursement information and other general polices and procedures.

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Posted Jan. 7, 2003