Policy Statement

Mesenchymal stem cell therapy is considered **investigational** for all orthopedic applications, including use in repair or regeneration of musculoskeletal tissue.

Allograft bone products containing viable stem cells, including but not limited to demineralized bone matrix with stem cells, are considered **investigational** for all orthopedic applications.

Allograft or synthetic bone graft substitutes that must be combined with autologous blood or bone marrow are considered **investigational** for all orthopedic applications.

Policy Guidelines

This policy does not address unprocessed allograft bone.

Coding

There are no specific codes for orthopedic applications of stem cell therapy.

The following is the appropriate CPT code for reporting this procedure of the body area on which the procedure is performed:

- **20999**: Unlisted procedure, musculoskeletal system, general

In addition, the following CPT codes are used for harvesting of mesenchymal stem cell (MSC) for transplantation:

- **38206**: Blood-derived hematopoietic progenitor cell harvesting for transplantation, per collection; autologous
- **38230**: Bone marrow harvesting for transplantation; allogeneic
- **38232**: Bone marrow harvesting for transplantation; autologous

The following CPT code may be used for the actual MSC transplantation:

- **38241**: Hematopoietic progenitor cell (HPC); autologous transplantation

Description

Mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) have the capability to differentiate into a variety of tissue types, including various musculoskeletal tissues. Potential uses of MSCs for orthopedic applications include treatment of damaged bone, cartilage, ligaments, tendons, and intervertebral discs.

Related Policies

- Autologous Chondrocyte Implantation for Focal Articular Cartilage Lesions
- Autologous Platelet-Derived Growth Factors for Wound Healing and Other Non-Orthopedic Conditions
- Orthopedic Applications of Platelet-Rich Plasma
- Prolotherapy

Benefit Application

Benefit determinations should be based in all cases on the applicable contract language. To the extent there are any conflicts between these guidelines and the contract language, the
contract language will control. Please refer to the member's contract benefits in effect at the
time of service to determine coverage or non-coverage of these services as it applies to an
individual member.

Some state or federal mandates [e.g., Federal Employee Program (FEP)] prohibits plans from
denying Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved technologies as investigational. In these
instances, plans may have to consider the coverage eligibility of the FDA-approved
technologies on the basis of medical necessity alone.

### Regulatory Status

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates human cells and tissues intended for
implantation, transplantation, or infusion through the Center for Biologics Evaluation and
Research, under Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) title 21, parts 1270 and 1271. Mesenchymal
stem cells (MSCs) are included in these regulations.

The regulatory status of the stem cell or stem cell-containing products addressed in this review is
summarized below.

Concentrated autologous MSCs do not require approval by the FDA. No products using
engineered or expanded MSCs have been approved by the FDA for orthopedic applications.

The following products are examples of commercialized demineralized bone matrix (DBM)
products. They are marketed as containing viable stem cells. In some instances, manufacturers
have received communications and inquiries from the FDA related to the appropriateness of
their marketing products that are dependent on living cells for their function. The following
descriptions are from the product literature.

- **AlloStem® (AlloSource)** is a partially demineralized allograft bone seeded with adipose-
derived MSCs.
- **Map3™** (rti Surgical) contains cortical cancellous bone chips, DBM, and cryopreserved
  multipotent adult progenitor cells (MAPC®).
- **Osteocel Plus®** (NuVasive) is a DBM combined with viable MSCs isolated from allogeneic
  bone marrow.
- **Trinity Evolution Matrix™** (Orthofix) is a DBM combined with viable MSCs isolated from
  allogeneic bone marrow.
- Other products contain DBM alone and are designed to be mixed with bone marrow
  aspirate:
  - **Fusion Flex™** (Wright Medical) is a dehydrated moldable DBM scaffold (strips and
    cubes) that will absorb autologous bone marrow aspirate.
  - **Ignite®** (Wright Medical) is an injectable graft with DBM that can be combined with
    autologous bone marrow aspirate.

A number of DBM combination products have been cleared for marketing by the FDA through
the 510(k) process. FDA product code: MQV.

Table 1 provides a representative sample of these products; some of which are specifically
labeled for mixing with bone marrow aspirate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Matrix Type</th>
<th>Mix with Autologous MSCs</th>
<th>Manufacturer or Sponsor</th>
<th>Date Cleared</th>
<th>510(k) No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitoss® Bioactive Foam Bone Graft Substitute</td>
<td>Type I bovine collagen</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Stryker</td>
<td>Nov 2008</td>
<td>K083033</td>
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In 2008, the FDA determined that the MSCs sold by Regenerative Sciences for use in the Regenexx-C™ procedure would be considered drugs or biologic products and thus require submission of a new drug application or biologic license application to the FDA.2 The Regenexx-C™ procedure originally used stem cells derived from bone marrow or synovial fluid and cultured the cells with autologous platelet lysate in a separate laboratory. Other compounds such as antibiotics were added before the material was returned to the patient in a separate orthopedic procedure. Regenerative Sciences asserted that the procedure was the practice of medicine and not subject to the FDA regulation. In 2014, a federal appellate court upheld the FDA authority to regulate adult stem cells as drugs and biologics and ruled that the Regenexx cell product fell within the FDA’s authority to regulate HCT/Ps.3 To date, no new drug application or biologic license application has been approved by the FDA for this product. As of 2015, the expanded stem cell procedure is only offered in the Cayman Islands. Regenexx® Stem Cell Procedure is offered through a network of facilities in the United States that provide same-day stem cell and blood platelet procedures that do not require the FDA approval. These procedures, along with the Regenexx® Super Concentrated Platelet Rich Plasma, are marketed as treatments for arthritis and injuries of the knee, hip, shoulder, spine, hand and wrist, foot and ankle and elbow.4

Rationale

Background

Mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) are multipotent cells (also called stromal multipotent cells) that can differentiate into various tissues including organs, trabecular bone, tendon, articular cartilage, ligaments, muscle, and fat. MSCs are associated with the blood vessels within bone marrow, synovium, fat, and muscle, where they can be mobilized for endogenous repair as occurs with healing of bone fractures. Tissues, such as muscle, cartilage, tendon, ligaments, and vertebral discs, show limited capacity for endogenous repair because of the limited presence of the triad of tissue functional components: vasculature, nerves, and lymphatics. Orthobiologics is a term introduced to describe interventions using cells and biomaterials to support healing and repair. Cell therapy is the application of MSCs directly to a musculoskeletal site. Tissue engineering techniques use MSCs and/or bioactive molecules such as growth factors and
scaffold combinations to improve the efficiency of repair or regeneration of damaged musculoskeletal tissues.\textsuperscript{3}

Bone marrow aspirate is considered the most accessible source and, thus, the most common place to isolate MSCs for treatment of musculoskeletal disease. However, harvesting MSCs from bone marrow requires a procedure that may result in donor-site morbidity. In addition, the number of MSCs in bone marrow is low, and the number and differentiation capacity of bone marrow-derived MSCs decreases with age, limiting their efficiency when isolated from older patients.

In vivo, the fate of stem cells is regulated by signals in the local 3-dimensional microenvironment from the extracellular matrix and neighboring cells. It is believed that the success of tissue engineering with MSCs will also require an appropriate 3-dimensional scaffold or matrix, culture conditions for tissue-specific induction, and implantation techniques that provide appropriate biomechanical forces and mechanical stimulation. The ability to induce cell division and differentiation without adverse effects, such as the formation of neoplasms, remains a significant concern. Given that each tissue type requires different culture conditions, induction factors (signaling proteins, cytokines, growth factors), and implantation techniques, each preparation must be individually examined.

**Literature Review**

Since this review was created, the evidence base has been steadily increasing, although we still lack high-quality randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and much of the research is still conducted internationally.

Assessment of efficacy for therapeutic intervention involves a determination of whether the intervention improves health outcomes. The optimal study design for this purpose is a randomized controlled trial (RCT) that includes clinically relevant measures of health outcomes. Intermediate outcome measures, also known as surrogate outcome measures, may also be adequate if there is an established link between the intermediate outcome and true health outcomes. Nonrandomized comparative studies and uncontrolled studies can sometimes provide useful information on health outcomes, but are prone to biases such as noncomparability of treatment groups, placebo effect, and variable natural history of the condition.

**Cartilage Defects**

The source of mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) may have an impact on outcomes, but this is not well-understood, and the available literature uses multiple sources of MSCs. Because of the uncertainty over whether these products are equivalent, we group the evidence by source of MSC.

One 2013 systematic review included multiple sources of MSC. In it, Filardo et al assessed MSCs for the treatment of cartilage lesions.\textsuperscript{5} They identified 72 preclinical and 18 clinical reports. Of the 18 clinical reports, none was randomized, 5 were comparative, 6 were case series, and 7 were case reports. The source of MSCs was derived from bone marrow in 11 clinical studies, bone marrow aspirate concentrate (BMAC) in 5 studies, and adipose tissue in 2 studies. Many of these trials had been performed by the same research group in Asia. The following is a summary of the key literature to date, focusing on comparative studies.

**MSCs Expanded From Bone Marrow**

**Autologous Bone Marrow for Treatment of Osteoarthritis**

In 2013 (after the Filardo review was published), Wong et al reported on an RCT of cultured MSCs in 56 patients with osteoarthritis who underwent medial opening wedge high tibial osteotomy and microfracture of a cartilage lesion.\textsuperscript{6} Bone marrow was harvested at the time of microfracture and the MSCs were isolated and cultured. After 3 weeks, the cells were assessed...
for viability and delivered to the clinic, where patients received an intra-articular injection of MSCs suspended in hyaluronic acid (HA), or for controls, intra-articular injection of HA alone. The primary outcome was the International Knee Documentation Committee (IKDC) score at 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years. Secondary outcomes were the Tegner Activity Scale (TAS) and Lysholm Knee Scale (LKS) scores through 2 years and the Magnetic Resonance Observation of Cartilage Repair Tissue (MOCART) scoring system (0-100 points, where higher scores indicate better cartilage repair) by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) at 1 year. All patients completed the 2-year follow-up. After adjusting for age, baseline scores, and time of evaluation, the group treated with MSCs showed significantly better scores on the IKDC (mean difference [MD], 7.65 on 0-100 scale; p=0.001), LKS (MD=7.61 on 0-100 scale; p=0.02), and TAS (MD=0.64 on a 0-10 scale; p=0.02). Blinded analysis of MRI results found higher MOCART scores in the MSC group. The group treated with MSCs had a higher proportion of patients who had complete cartilage coverage of their lesions (32% vs 0%), greater than 50% cartilage cover (36% vs 14%), and complete integration of the regenerated cartilage (61% vs 14%). No subsequent citations for this author and study have been identified.

Wakitani et al first reported use of expanded MSCs for repair of cartilage defects in 2002. Cells from bone marrow aspirate of 12 patients with osteoarthritic knees were culture expanded, embedded in collagen gel, transplanted into the articular cartilage defect, and covered with autologous periosteum at the time of high tibial osteotomy. Clinical improvement did not differ between the experimental group and a group of 12 control patients who underwent high tibial osteotomy alone. Wakitani et al (2007) have since published several cases of patients treated for isolated cartilage defects, with clinical improvement reported at up to 27 months. However, most of the defects appear to have been filled with fibrocartilage. A 2011 report from Wakitani et al was a follow-up safety study of 31 of the 41 patients (3 patients had died, 5 had undergone total knee arthroplasty) who had received MSCs for articular cartilage repair in their clinics between 1998 and 2008. At a mean of 75 months (range, 5-137 months) since the index procedure, no tumors or infections were identified. Functional outcomes were not reported.

Another study (2010) from Asia evaluated the efficacy of bone marrow–derived MSCs compared with autologous chondrocyte implantation (ACI) in 36 matched patient pairs. Thirty-six consecutive patients with at least 1 symptomatic chondral lesion on the femoral condyle, trochlea, or patella were matched with 36 cases of ACI performed earlier, based on lesion sites and 10-year age intervals. Autologous MSCs were cultured from 30 mL of bone marrow from the iliac crest, tested to confirm that the cultured cells were MSCs, and implanted beneath a periosteal patch. There were mixed indications based on the concomitant procedures, which included patella realignment, high-tibial osteotomy, partial meniscectomy, and anterior cruciate ligament reconstruction. Clinical outcomes, measured preoperatively and at 3, 6, 12, 18, and 24 months after operation using the International Cartilage Repair Society Cartilage Injury Evaluation Package, showed improvements in patients’ scores over the 2-year follow-up in both groups, with no significant difference between groups for any of the outcome measures except for physical role functioning scale on the 36-Item Short-Form Health Survey, which showed a greater improvement over time in the MSC group.

A 2010 publication from Centeno et al of Regenerative Sciences has described the use of percutaneously injected culture-expanded MSCs obtained from the iliac spine in 226 patients. Following harvesting, cells were cultured with autologous platelet lysate and reinjected under fluoroscopic guidance into peripheral joints (n=213) or intervertebral discs (n=13). Follow-up for adverse events at a mean of 10.6 months showed 10 cases of probable procedure-related complications (injections or stem cell–related), all of which were considered to be self-limited or treated with simple therapeutic measures. Serial MRIs from a subset of patients showed no evidence of tumor formation at a median follow-up of 15 months. The efficacy of these procedures was not reported and indications for the injections varied. This procedure is no longer offered in the United States.
In 2017, Shapiro et al reported on the results of a prospective, single-blind, placebo-controlled trial assessing 25 patients with bilateral knee pain from bilateral osteoarthritis. Patients were randomized to BMAC into 1 knee and to saline placebo into the other. Fifty-two milliliters of bone marrow was aspirated from the iliac crests and concentrated in an automated centrifuge. The resulting BMAC was combined with platelet-poor plasma for an injection into the arthritic knee and was compared with a saline injection into the contralateral knee, thereby using each patient as his or her own control. Safety outcomes, pain relief, and function as measured by Osteoarthritis Research Society International (OARSI) measures and a visual analog scale (VAS) score were tracked initially at 1 week, 3 months, and 6 months postprocedure. Study patients experienced a similar relief of pain in both BMAC- and saline-treated arthritic knees. This trial is important because some previously reported studies have used injection of high-molecular weight HA derivatives as an active comparator. HA derivatives have been used for viscosupplementation in arthritic knee joints. However, a systematic review, prepared for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality on effectiveness of HA in the treatment of degenerative joint disease in knee joints, reported that no conclusions can be drawn from available literature on avoidance or delay of total knee replacement with the use of HA.

**Allogeneic Bone Marrow for Treatment of Osteoarthritis**

In 2015, Vega et al reported on a small phase 1/2 RCT of 30 patients with osteoarthritis unresponsive to conventional treatments. The MSC-treated group received intra-articular injection of expanded allogeneic bone marrow MSCs from healthy donors and the control group received an intra-articular injection of HA. Follow-up using standard outcome measures was performed at 3, 6, and 12 months postinjection. In the MSC-treated group, pain scores (VAS and Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Arthritis Index) decreased significantly between baseline and the 12-month follow-up, whereas pain scores in the control group did not improve significantly. A significant improvement in cartilage quality in the MSC group was supported by T2 MRI. Not reported was whether the patients or assessors were blinded to treatment.

**MSCs from Bone Marrow Aspirate Concentrate**

In 2009, Giannini et al reported on a 1-step procedure for transplanting bone marrow–derived cells for type II (>1.5 cm², <5 mm deep) osteochondral lesions of the talus in 48 patients. A total of 60-mL bone marrow aspirate was collected from the iliac crest. The bone marrow–derived cells were concentrated and implanted with a scaffold (collagen powder or HA membrane) and platelet gel. In a 2010 publication, Giannini et al reported results of a retrospective analysis based on the evolution of the investigator’s technique at the time of treatment. Outcomes following arthroscopic application of the MSC concentrate (n=25) were similar to open (n=10) or arthroscopic (n=46) ACI. Both studies treated posttraumatic lesions. ACI with a biodegradable scaffold is not commercially available in the United States (see Blue Shield of California Medical Policy: Autografts and Allografts in the Treatment of Focal Articular Cartilage Lesions).

Centeno et al (2015) reported on a multicenter registry of patients treated with autologous stem cells, BMAC, and platelet-rich plasma (PRP). This study focused on 102 patients (115 shoulders) diagnosed with osteoarthritis of the shoulder or rotator cuff tears. Patients were treated with a protocol that included a hypertonic dextrose solution (prolotherapy) injection to create an inflammatory response several days prior to the BMAC injection. The BMAC injection included PRP and platelet lysate. Both Disabilities of the Arm, Shoulder, and Hand and numeric rating scale for pain scores decreased by about 50%, although the absolute decrease in the numeric rating scale score was a very modest 0.9. Interpretation of these results is limited by the lack of a placebo control and blinding, subjective outcome measures, and the multiple treatments used, although it is not established whether prolotherapy or PRP appear to have efficacy on their own. Additional study with randomized and placebo-controlled trials is needed to evaluate this treatment protocol.
Adipose-Derived MSCs

Adipose-derived stem cells (ASCs) are multipotential mesenchymal cells that can be harvested from multiple anatomic locations and with greater ease than bone marrow–derived MSCs. The literature on adipose-derived MSCs for articular cartilage repair comes from 2 research groups in Korea. One group appears to have been providing this treatment as an option for patients for a number of years. They compared outcomes of this new add-on treatment with those for patients who only received other cartilage repair procedures.

In 2014, Koh et al reported results of an RCT that evaluated cartilage healing after high tibial osteotomy (HTO) in 52 patients with osteoarthritis of the medial compartment. Patients were randomized via sealed envelopes to HTO with application of PRP or to HTO with application of PRP plus MSCs. (Use of PRP has insufficient evidence to demonstrate improved net health outcome, see Blue Shield of California Medical Policy: Autologous Platelet-Derived Growth Factors for Wound Healing and Other Non-Orthopedic Conditions for further information.) MSCs from adipose tissue were obtained through liposuction from the buttocks. The tissue was centrifuged and the stromal vascular fraction mixed with PRP for injection. A total of 44 patients completed second-look arthroscopy and 1- and 2-year clinical follow-ups. The primary outcomes were the Knee Injury and Osteoarthritis Outcome Score (KOOS; 5 subscales with 0-100 scale), the LKS score (0-100 scale), and a VAS for pain (0-100 scale). There were statistically significant differences between PRP only and PRP plus MSC on 2 of 5 KOOS subscales: pain (74, SD=5.7 vs 81.2, SD=6.9, p<0.001) and symptoms (75.4, SD=8.5 vs 82.8, SD=7.2, p=0.006), all respectively. There were also statistically significant differences on the final pain score between the PRP only (16.2, SD=4.6) and PRP plus MSC groups (10.2, SD=5.7; p<0.001), but the final LKS score did not differ significantly between the PRP only (80.6, SD=13.5) and PRP plus MSC groups (84.7, SD=16.2; p=0.36). Articular cartilage healing was rated as improved with MSCs following video review of second-look arthroscopy; blinding of this measure is unclear. Study design and results were flawed—small sample size, short duration of follow-up, and significant improvements only on some outcomes. All significant differences in outcomes were modest in magnitude and, as a result, there is uncertainty about the clinical significance of the findings.

A 2013 publication from this Korean group retrospectively compared outcomes from 35 patients (37 ankles) who were older than 50 years of age, had focal osteochondral lesions of the talus, and were treated with microfracture alone between 2008 and 2010. The comparison group was 30 patients (31 ankles) who received MSC injection along with marrow stimulation between 2010 and 2011. MSCs were harvested from the fat pad of the buttck of the patients 1 day before surgery, concentrated, and injected after the arthroscopic procedure. With an average 22 month follow-up (range, 12-44 months), patients treated with MSCs showed greater improvements in VAS, American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society Ankle–Hindfoot Scale, TAS, and the Roles and Maudsley scores. A 2014 retrospective review from this group reported clinical outcomes and MRI results from 49 patients who had undergone marrow stimulation with or without MSCs at their institution. Use of MSCs in addition to microfracture was determined by patient choice, and there was an overlap of 26 patients between this report and their 2013 previously discussed publication. This analysis also found modest but statistically significant improvements in clinical outcomes for the MSC group compared with microfracture alone. Blinded ratings with the MOCART scale resulted in scores that suggested greater improvement in the MSC group (62.1) than in the conventional group (49.4; p=0.037).

Koh et al (2012) also reported on a retrospective analysis of the injection of adipose-derived MSCs from the infrapatellar fat pad and PRP into arthroscopically débrided knees of 25 patients with osteoarthritis of the knee. Results were compared with a randomly selected group of patients who had previously undergone arthroscopic débridement and PRP injections without stem cells. Although there was a trend for greater improvement in the MSC group, at final follow-up, there was no significant difference between the MSC and control groups in clinical outcomes (LKS, TAS, VAS).
In 2014, another group reported a phase 1/2 trial of intra-articular injection of adipose-derived MSCs for the treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee. Phase 1 was a dose-escalation study of 9 patients and phase 2 assessed efficacy of the highest dose in another 9 patients. The study of 18 patients was approved by the Korean Food and Drug Administration. Procedures included liposuction, arthroscopy of the knee 1 week later with MSC injection through the portal, MRI at 3 and 6 months, and second-look arthroscopy with punch biopsy at 6 months. Intention-to-treat analysis showed a 39% improvement in Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Arthritis Index score and a 45% improvement in VAS score at 6 months postinjection. Arthroscopy showed a decrease in size of the cartilage defect and an increase in the volume of cartilage. Histology showed thick, hyaline-like cartilage regeneration.

MSCs from Peripheral Blood
A 2013 report from Asia has described a small RCT with autologous peripheral blood MSCs for focal articular cartilage lesions. Fifty patients with grade 3 or 4 lesions of the knee joint underwent arthroscopic subchondral drilling followed by 5 weekly injections of HA. Half the patients were randomized to injections of peripheral blood stem cells or to no further treatment. There were baseline differences in age between the groups, with a mean age of 38 years for the treatment group and a mean of 42 for the control group. The peripheral blood stem cells were harvested after stimulation with recombinant human granulocyte colony-stimulating factor, divided in vials, and cryopreserved. At 6 months after surgery, HA and MSCs were readministered over 3 weekly injections. At 18 months postsurgery, second-look arthroscopy on 16 patients in each group showed significantly higher histologic scores (≈10%) for the MSC group (1066 vs 957 by independent observers) while blinded evaluation of MRI scans showed a higher morphologic score (9.9 vs 8.5). There was no difference in IKDC scores between the 2 groups at 24 months after surgery. It is uncertain whether differences in patient age at baseline affected the response to subchondral drilling.

MSCs from Synovial Tissue
Akgun et al (2015) reported on a small (N=14), though without major bias, investigator-blinded RCT that compared matrix-induced autologous MSCs from synovial tissue with matrix-induced autologous chondrocyte implantation (MACI). Both chondrocytes from cartilage and MSCs from synovia were harvested in an arthroscopic procedure, expanded in culture, and then cultured on a collagen membrane for 2 days. Implantation was performed with the construct trimmed to the size and shape of the defect and placed with the cells facing the subchondral bone. Rehabilitation was the same for the 2 groups, with continuous passive motion for at least 1 hour daily and nonweight bearing for the first 6 weeks. The 2 groups were similar at baseline, and all patients completed the evaluations through 24 months. Outcomes on KOOS subscales and TAS were statistically better in the MSC group, although it is not clear if the difference observed would be considered clinically significant, with differences of around 6 on the 100-point KOOS subscales and 0.6 on the 10-point TAS. The results of this small pilot study would suggest that cartilage repair with matrix-induced MSCs from synovial tissue may provide outcomes at least as good as MACI, warranting additional study in a larger sample. Neither procedure is approved for use in the United States.

Section Summary: Cartilage Defects
The evidence base on MSCs for cartilage repair is increasing, although nearly all studies to date have been performed in Asia with a variety of methods of MSC preparation. Four randomized studies have reported improvements in histologic and morphologic outcomes. Three of these studies also reported improvements in functional outcomes. The method of preparation used in 1 positive study was to obtain MSCs from bone marrow at the time of microfracture, culture (expand) over a period of 3 weeks, and injected into the knee in a carrier of HA. Another randomized trial, using MSCs from peripheral blood, found improvements in histologic and morphologic outcomes, but not functional outcomes, following stimulation with recombinant human granulocyte colony-stimulating factor. A third small RCT found that MSCs from synovial tissue and cultured in collagen resulted in outcomes at least as good as those following MACI.
The literature on adipose-derived MSCs includes a phase 1/2 trial with cultured MSCs and an RCT from a separate group in Asia that has been using uncultured MSCs as an adjunctive procedure in clinical practice. Comparisons between patients who have and have not received uncultured adipose-derived MSCs have shown modest improvements in health outcomes of uncertain clinical significance. Potential for bias from nonblinded use of a novel procedure on subjective outcome measures is also a limitation of these studies. The phase 1/2 trial of cultured MSCs from adipose tissue showed promising results for this technology. Additional study in a larger sample of patients with longer follow-up would be needed to evaluate the long-term efficacy and safety of the procedure. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval for this method has also not been obtained.

**Meniscal Defects**

Damage to the meniscal cartilage in the knee is among the most common orthopedic injuries and predisposes to development of osteoarthritis. The tissue is relatively avascular and does not spontaneously heal well. Standard treatment is arthroscopic removal of damaged tissue to relieve symptoms of pain.

In 2017, Whitehouse et al published a report on techniques of in vitro expansion of autologous-derived MSCs and a case series of first-in-human implantation to treat meniscal defects in 5 patients.25 The regulatory framework in the U.K. allows cell manipulation and requires immunohistochemical documentation of the presence and volume of mesenchymal cells. Over the first 12 months postprocedure, 3 of the 5 patients were reported to have clinical symptom relief, which persisted through 24 months. MRI scans showing lack of meniscal displacement were the only other postoperative assessment. The 2 patients who failed to obtain symptom relief at 6 and 12 month had repeat arthroscopic procedures with meniscectomy.

In 2014, Vangsness et al reported on an industry-sponsored phase 1/2 randomized, double-blind, multicenter study (NCT00225095, NCT00702741) of cultured allogeneic MSCs (Chondrogen; Osiris Therapeutics) injected into the knee after partial meniscectomy.26 The 55 patients in this U.S. study were randomized to intra-articular injection of either $50 \times 10^6$ allogeneic MSCs, $150 \times 10^6$ allogeneic MSCs in HA, or a HA vehicle control at 7 to 10 days after meniscectomy. The cultured MSCs were derived from BMAC from unrelated donors. At 2-year follow-up, 3 patients in the low-dose MSC group had significantly increased meniscal volume measured by MRI (with an a priori determined threshold of at least 15%) compared with none in the control group or in the high-dose MSC group. There was no significant difference between the groups in the LKS score. On subgroup analysis, patients with osteoarthritis who received MSCs had a significantly greater reduction in pain at 2 years than patients who received HA alone. This study appears to have been a post hoc analysis and, hence, should be considered preliminary. No serious adverse events were reported as related to the investigational treatment.

**Section Summary: Meniscal Defects**

The evidence for the use of MSCs to repair or regenerate damaged meniscal tissue consists of preclinical animal studies, a first-in-human uncontrolled implantation of expanded autologous MSCs into meniscal tears, and an early-phase randomized trial of cultured allogeneic MSCs injected into the site of partial meniscectomy. Results are preliminary.

**Joint Fusion Procedures**

There is limited evidence on the use of allografts with stem cells for fusion of the extremities or spine or for the treatment of nonunion. The results of several industry-sponsored, early-phase trials are now available.

A prospective, clinical, and radiographic 12-month outcomes study of patients undergoing single-level anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF) for symptomatic cervical degenerative disc disease using a novel viable allogeneic stem cell and cancellous bone matrix (Trinity Evolution) was reported using comparison to historical controls.27 The ACDF procedure was performed using the polyetheretherketone (PEEK) interbody spacer and bone graft.
substitute (Trinity Evolution) in 31 patients at multiple clinical sites. At 6 and 12 months, the primary end point of radiographic fusion was evaluated as determined by independent radiographic review and the fusion rate was 78.6% at 6 months and 93.5% at 12 months. Secondary endpoints included function assessed by Neck Disability Index scores, and neck and arm pain as assessed by individual VAS scores. Neck function and neck and arm pain were reported as significantly improved at both 6 and 12 months postprocedure. Reported adverse events included carpal tunnel syndrome, minor pain, numbness, permanent and/or unresolved pain, and swelling. Independent medical adjudication of the 26 adverse events occurring in 31 patients found that no adverse events definitely or probably related to Trinity Evolution. However, 5 adverse events were found to be possibly related to Trinity Evolution with 3 events of mild severity and 2 of moderate severity.

A similar study involving several of the same investigators and clinical sites reported on the clinical and radiographic evaluation of an allogeneic bone matrix containing stem cells (Trinity Evolution Viable Cellular Bone Matrix) in patients undergoing 2-level ACDF.28 This study involved 40 patients exposed to the ACDF and bone graft substitute procedure at 2 adjacent disc levels. A panel blinded to clinical outcomes reviewed 12-month dynamic motion plain radiographs and thin-cut computed tomography with multiplanar reconstruction. At 12 months, the per-subject and per-level fusion rates were 89.4% and 93.4%, respectively. The clinical function assessments using Neck Disability Index and VAS scores were reported to have improved from baseline.

A 2015 prospective, multicenter, open-label clinical trial using a cryopreserved, donor mesenchymal cell scaffold (Trinity Evolution) was performed in subjects undergoing foot and/or ankle arthrodesis with the surgeon's preferred technique.29 A total of 103 subjects were prospectively enrolled at 10 participating sites. No restrictions were placed on the diagnosis, which included arthritis (primary osteoarthritis, posttraumatic osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid), deformity, neuropathy (Charcot and diabetic), revision surgery, and degenerative joint disease, and arthrodesis was performed in 171 joints. The per-protocol population consisted of 92 patients at 6 months and 76 patients at 12 months, with 153 and 129 total arthrodeses, respectively. The primary end point was fusion at 6 months, as assessed from computed tomography scans and standard radiographs by an independent radiology consultant. At 6 months fusion rate was 68.5% in 81.1% of joints. American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society Hindfoot Scale scores for disability improved over time.

In 2014, Eastlack et al reported outcomes from a series of 182 patients treated with ACDF using Osteocel Plus in a PEEK cage and anterior plating.30 At 24 months, 74% of patients (180/249 levels treated) were available for follow-up. These patients had significant improvements in clinical outcomes; 87% of levels achieved solid bridging and 92% of levels had range of motion less than 3°. With 26% loss to follow-up at 24 months and lack of a standard of care control group, interpretation of these results is limited.

**Section Summary: Joint Fusion Procedures**

The evidence for the use of MSCs as a component of joint fusion procedures primarily comes from industry-sponsored prospective but open-label procedures. Outcomes are radiologic assessments of fusion, sometimes made independently, and patient-reported measures (e.g., VAS scores). The MSCs used are cryopreserved allogeneic in origin. Presumptive benefits of allogeneic MSCs are that patients undergoing an orthopedic intervention procedure do not need another graft harvesting procedure and that dose of stem cells can be managed.

**Osteonecrosis**

We identified 2 randomized comparative trials from Asia that have evaluated the use of MSCs for osteonecrosis of the femoral head.
MSCs Concentrated from Bone Marrow Aspirate Concentrate

Another small trial (2012) randomized 40 patients (51 hips) with early-stage femoral head osteonecrosis to core decompression plus concentrated bone marrow MSCs or to core decompression alone. Blinding of assessments in this small trial was not described. Harris Hip Score was significantly improved in the core decompression plus MSC group compared with the core decompression alone group at 12 months (scores, 83.65 vs 76.68, p<0.016) but not at 24 months (scores, 82.42 vs 77.39; p=0.09). Kaplan-Meier analysis showed improved hip survival in the MSC group (mean, 51.9 weeks) compared with the core decompression group (mean, 46.7 weeks). There were no significant differences between groups in radiographic assessment or MRI results.

MSCs Expanded From Bone Marrow

In 2012, Zhao et al reported a randomized trial that included 100 patients (104 hips) with early-stage femoral head osteonecrosis treated with core decompression and expanded bone marrow MSCs or with core decompression alone. At 60 months post-surgery, 2 (3.7%) of the 53 hips treated with MSCs progressed and underwent vascularized bone grafting compared with 10 (23%) of 44 hips in the decompression group who progressed and underwent either vascularized bone grafting (n=5) or total hip replacement (n=5). The MSC group also had improved Harris Hip Scores compared with the control group on independent evaluation (data presented graphically). The volume of the lesion was also reduced by treatment with MSCs.

Section Summary: Osteonecrosis

Two small studies from Asia have compared core decompression alone with core decompression plus MSCs in patients with osteonecrosis of the femoral head. Both reported improvement in the Harris Hip Score in patients treated with MSCs, although it was not reported whether the patients or investigators were blinded to the treatment group. Hip survival was significantly improved following treatment with either expanded or concentrated MSCs. The effect appears to be larger with expanded MSCs than with concentrated MSCs. Additional studies with a larger number of patients are needed to permit greater certainty on the effect of this treatment on health outcomes.

Summary of Evidence

For individuals who have cartilage defects, meniscal defects, joint fusion procedures, or osteonecrosis who receive stem cell therapy, the evidence includes small randomized controlled trials and nonrandomized comparative trials. Relevant outcomes are symptoms, morbid events, functional outcomes, quality of life, and treatment-related morbidity. Use of mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs) for orthopedic conditions is an active area of research. Despite continued research into the methods of harvesting and delivering treatment, there are uncertainties regarding the optimal source of cells and the delivery method. Studies have included MSCs from bone marrow, adipose tissue, peripheral blood, and synovial tissue. The largest body of evidence has evaluated use of autologous MSCs, either concentrated or expanded in culture, for cartilage repair. This evidence includes small randomized and nonrandomized comparative trials with insufficient data to evaluate health outcomes. In addition, expanded MSCs for orthopedic applications are not U.S. Food and Drug Administration–approved (concentrated autologous MSCs do not require agency approval). Overall, there is a lack of evidence that clinical outcomes are improved. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

Supplemental Information

Practice Guidelines and Position Statements
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
The 2013 and 2014 American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons’ guidelines on treatment of glenohumeral joint osteoarthritis have indicated:
- Treatment using allograft, autograft, biologic, and interpositional grafts in patients with glenohumeral joint osteoarthritis is inconclusive.33
- Treatment using growth factor injections and/or platelet rich plasma for patients with symptomatic osteoarthritis of the knee is inconclusive.34

American Association of Neurological Surgeons
The American Association of Neurological Surgeons 2014 guidelines on fusion procedures for degenerative disease of the lumbar spine related to this evidence review have indicated that “The use of demineralized bone matrix (DBM) as a bone graft extender is an option for 1- and 2-level instrumented posterolateral fusions. Demineralized Bone Matrix: Grade C (poor level of evidence).”35

International Society for Cellular Therapy
In 2006, the International Society for Cellular Therapy proposed a minimal set of criteria to standardize the characterization of multipotent mesenchymal stem cells.36 The proposed criteria for human mesenchymal stem cells included plastic adherence when maintained in standard culture conditions; a phenotype of expression of CD105, CD73, and CD90 with a lack surface expression of CD45, CD34, CD14 or CD11b, CD79 alpha or CD19, and human leukocyte antigen–antigen D related surface molecules; and the capability of differentiating into osteoblasts, adipocytes, and chondrocytes using standard in vitro tissue culture-differentiating conditions.

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendations
Not applicable.

Medicare National Coverage
There is no national coverage determination. In the absence of a national coverage determination, coverage decisions are left to the discretion of local Medicare carriers.

Ongoing and Unpublished Clinical Trials
Some currently unpublished trials that might influence this review are listed in Table 2. Many are observational studies with commercially available products (e.g., Cartistem, AlloStem, Trinity Evolution, Osteocel Plus).

Table 2. Summary of Key Trials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCT No.</th>
<th>Trial Name</th>
<th>Planned Enrollment</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Study of Subtalar Arthrodesis Using AlloStem® Versus Autologous Bone Graft</td>
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<td>Sep 2017</td>
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<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Mesenchymal Stem Cells in a Clinical Trial to Heal Articular Cartilage Defects</td>
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<td>Unpublished</td>
<td>Randomized, Open-Label, Multi-Center and Phase 3 Clinical Trial to Compare the Efficacy and Safety of Cartistem® and Microfracture in Patients With Knee Articular Cartilage Injury or Defect/ Long Term Follow-Up Study of CARTISTEM® Versus Microfracture</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>May 2015 (completed)</td>
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</table>

NCT: National Clinical Trial.

a Denotes industry-sponsored or cosponsored trial.
References


Documentation for Clinical Review

- No records required

Coding

This Policy relates only to the services or supplies described herein. Benefits may vary according to product design; therefore, contract language should be reviewed before applying the terms of the Policy. Inclusion or exclusion of a procedure, diagnosis or device code(s) does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement.

IE

The following services may be considered investigational.

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<thead>
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<th>Type</th>
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<td>Unlisted procedure, musculoskeletal system, general</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38206</td>
<td>Blood-derived hematopoietic progenitor cell harvesting for transplantation, per collection; autologous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38230</td>
<td>Bone marrow harvesting for transplantation; allogeneic</td>
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<td>38232</td>
<td>Bone marrow harvesting for transplantation; autologous</td>
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<td>38241</td>
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<td>Introduction of Recombinant Bone Morphogenetic Protein into Joints, Open Approach</td>
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<td>3E0V3GC</td>
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Orthopedic Applications of Stem Cell Therapy (Including Allografts and Bone Substitutes Used with Autologous Bone Marrow)

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<td>Pheresis of Hematopoietic Stem Cells, Multiple</td>
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ICD-10 Diagnosis

All Diagnoses

Policy History

This section provides a chronological history of the activities, updates and changes that have occurred with this Medical Policy.

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<th>Action</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tr>
<td>03/29/2013</td>
<td>BCBSA Medical Policy adoption</td>
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<tr>
<td>06/30/2015</td>
<td>Coding Update</td>
<td>Administrative Review</td>
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<td>09/30/2015</td>
<td>Policy title change from Orthopedic Applications of Stem Cell Therapy Policy revision without position change</td>
<td>Medical Policy Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>04/01/2016</td>
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<td>Medical Policy Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/01/2017</td>
<td>Policy revision without position change</td>
<td>Medical Policy Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definitions of Decision Determinations

**Medically Necessary:** A treatment, procedure, or drug is medically necessary only when it has been established as safe and effective for the particular symptoms or diagnosis, is not investigational or experimental, is not being provided primarily for the convenience of the patient or the provider, and is provided at the most appropriate level to treat the condition.

**Investigational/Experimental:** A treatment, procedure, or drug is investigational when it has not been recognized as safe and effective for use in treating the particular condition in accordance with generally accepted professional medical standards. This includes services where approval by the federal or state governmental is required prior to use, but has not yet been granted.

**Split Evaluation:** Blue Shield of California/Blue Shield of California Life & Health Insurance Company (Blue Shield) policy review can result in a split evaluation, where a treatment, procedure, or drug will be considered investigational for certain indications or conditions, but will be deemed safe and effective for other indications or conditions, and therefore potentially medically necessary in those instances.

Prior Authorization Requirements (as applicable to your plan)

Within five days before the actual date of service, the provider must confirm with Blue Shield that the member's health plan coverage is still in effect. Blue Shield reserves the right to revoke an authorization prior to services being rendered based on cancellation of the member's eligibility. Final determination of benefits will be made after review of the claim for limitations or exclusions.

Questions regarding the applicability of this policy should be directed to the Prior Authorization Department. Please call (800) 541-6652 or visit the provider portal at www.blueshieldca.com/provider.
Disclaimer: This medical policy is a guide in evaluating the medical necessity of a particular service or treatment. Blue Shield of California may consider published peer-reviewed scientific literature, national guidelines, and local standards of practice in developing its medical policy. Federal and state law, as well as contract language, including definitions and specific contract provisions/exclusions, take precedence over medical policy and must be considered first in determining covered services. Member contracts may differ in their benefits. Blue Shield reserves the right to review and update policies as appropriate.