



Plain language summary

Maintenance/Custodial Care

Utilization Management Policy # 449

Plain Language Summaries are presented to supplement the associated clinical policy and/or guideline. These summaries are not a substitute for advice from your own healthcare provider.

What is maintenance/custodial care and what is known about it so far?

Musculoskeletal pain is a common experience for most people. Traditional nonsurgical treatments that are helpful for some patients with musculoskeletal pain include physical therapy, manipulation (chiropractic), exercise, and drugs (pain killers, anti-inflammatory drugs, and muscle relaxants). Most treatments reach a point where either patient complaints have resolved, or no further improvement can be expected. It is understandable that, once improvement has been achieved, some patients choose to continue with periodic in-office care with an expectation of preventing recurrences or to keep a chronic condition from worsening. This type of care is termed Maintenance or Custodial Care.

Most healthcare benefit certificates do not include coverage for maintenance (custodial) care, when rendered in a chiropractic, physical therapy, or occupational therapy office.

How was the maintenance/custodial care benefit evaluated?

A work group of clinicians was assigned to review the available research. The internet and journals were searched for policies and articles that provided information about 1) current descriptions and uses of maintenance/custodial care; 2) are there types of patients or conditions likely to benefit from maintenance (custodial) care; 3) what is/are the recommended treatment schedules for patients who elect to receive maintenance care; and 4) is there scientific literature confirming that either new episodes can be prevented or chronic symptoms can be kept from worsening?

After gathering and analyzing this information, a policy was presented to a series of committees that included independent health care practitioners.

What did the workgroup find?

The value of maintenance/custodial care is unclear

- The research regarding the use of maintenance/custodial care is limited and of very low quality that conclusions about the types of patients and/or conditions likely to benefit from regular maintenance/custodial care cannot be made
- Other health care organizations and governmental agencies have reached the same conclusions
- There is a need for additional research studies

What were the limitations of the information?

The majority of research related to maintenance/custodial care was performed by chiropractors. Much of this research is based upon opinion. There is little to no information about how this type of care is actually provided by physical and occupational therapists.

What are the conclusions?

Maintenance/custodial care is considered to be unproven and not medically necessary due to insufficient scientific evidence of benefit in the treatment of disorders typically managed by chiropractors, physical therapists, and occupational therapists.

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What are the options?

Once complaints have either resolved or no further improvement can be expected, the patient and treating provider may consider:

- a) Discharge from scheduled in-office care with home-care recommendations
- b) Discharge from scheduled in-office care; return for treatment only when complaints noticeably worsen in spite of self-care measures
- c) Elect to pursue maintenance/custodial care, which is not a covered benefit.
 - The patient may be required to sign a “Billing Acknowledgement Form” prior to receiving maintenance/custodial care.* (*not required in NJ)
 - By signing this form, a patient assumes financial responsibility for maintenance (custodial) care.