Speech Generating Device

Description

Total Health Care considers speech generating devices, or augmentative communication devices, as electric or non-electric aid or device used for communication by individuals who do not have the ability to communicate with speech or alternatives to speech (writing and sign language).

Speech generating devices provide multiple methods of message formulation and are used therapeutically to establish, develop, or maintain the ability to communicate functional needs. The device must be an integral part of a treatment plan for a person with a severe communication disability who is otherwise unable to communicate basic functional needs.

Administrative Criteria

1. Member must have effective coverage of date of service and DME benefit.
2. Member’s PCP or other appropriate contracted provider must request services.
3. Request must be reviewed and prior authorized by Plan’s Medical Director.
4. Service must be determined to be medically necessary and appropriate for affected member’s medical condition.

Clinical Criteria

1. Prior to the delivery of the device, the member has had a formal evaluation of their cognitive and communication abilities by a speech-language pathologist. The formal, written evaluation must include, at a minimum, the following elements:
   a. Current communication impairment, including the type, severity, language skills, cognitive ability, and anticipated course of the impairment;
   b. An assessment of whether the member’s daily communication needs could be met using the other natural modes of communication;
   c. A description of the functional communication goals expected to be achieved and treatment options;
   d. Rationale for selection of a specific device and any accessories;
   e. Demonstration that the patient possesses a treatment plan that includes a training schedule for the selected device;

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1 Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina; Corporate Medical Policy; Speech Generating Devices; Policy # DME 0235; Orig. 10/2006; Last Review 06/2008; Next Review 06/2010
2 Aetna; Clinical Policy Bulletin: Speech Generating Devices; No. 0437; http://www.aetna.com accessed 10/23/08
3 AAC-RERC-Spread the Word-Medicare AAC Device Coverage Guidance; Regional Medical Review Policy; Orig. Policy Eff. Date 07/01/01. http://www.aac-rerc.com-accessed 10/23/08
f. The cognitive and physical abilities to effectively use the selected device and any accessories to communicate;
g. For a subsequent upgrade to a previously issued device, information regarding the functional benefit to the member of the upgrade compared to the initially provided device; and

2. The member’s medical condition is one resulting in a severe expressive speech impairment; and
3. The member’s speaking needs cannot be met using natural communication methods; and
4. Other forms of treatment have been considered and ruled out; and
5. The member’s speech impairment will benefit from the device ordered; and
6. A copy of the speech-language pathologist’s written evaluation and recommendation have been signed by the member’s treating physician and provided for review; and
7. The speech-language pathologist (SLP) performing the evaluation is not an employee of or has a financial relationship with the supplier of the device.

Exceptions

1. Devices that are not dedicated speech devices, but are capable of running software for purposes other than speech generation, e.g., devices that can also run a word processing package, an accounting program, or perform other non-medical functions.
2. Laptop or desktop computers or PDA which may be programmed to perform the same function as a speech generating device, are non-covered since they are not primarily medical in nature and do not meet the definition of DME.
3. A device hat is useful to someone without severe speech impairment.
4. Communication aids that do not generate speech.
5. Multilingual modules for SGDs are not considered medically necessary.
6. Accessories and upgrades for; the SGD considered medically necessary if the basic medical necessity criteria are met and the medical necessity for each accessory is clearly documented in the formal evaluation by the SLP.
7. Only one speech generating device or speech generating software program at a time is considered medically necessary per member.

Terminology

SGD=Speech Generating Device. A SGD or communication device is used by an individual to enable him or her to communicate more effectively with others. A device assists an individual in communicating through printed words, speech or voice output, pictures, or any combination of these.

DME=Durable Medical Equipment. Medical equipment used in the course of treatment or home care, including such items as crutches, knee braces, wheelchairs, hospital beds, etc.
PDA=Personal Digital Assistants. PDA (personal digital assistant) is a term for any small mobile had-held device that provides computing and information storage and retrieval capabilities.