Stem-Cell Transplantation for Solid Tumors in Children

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Coverage Policy

High-dose chemotherapy followed by autologous hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation is considered medically necessary for the treatment of ANY of the following solid tumors:

- relapsed Wilms’ tumor
- metastatic non-central nervous system (non-CNS) retinoblastoma
- relapsed or progressive Ewing family of tumors

Overview

This Coverage Policy addresses high-dose chemotherapy followed by autologous hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation for the treatment of solid tumors (e.g., Wilms’, Ewing) in children.

General Background

Solid tumors in children are a heterogeneous group of cancers that includes Wilms’ tumor, retinoblastoma, Ewing family of tumors, rhabdomyosarcoma, germ-cell tumors, and soft tissue sarcomas. Treatment options include surgical resection, radiation and chemotherapy regimens. Autologous hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation (HSCT) has been investigated as a treatment of various solid tumors in children.
**Hematopoietic Stem-Cell Transplantation (HSCT)**

Stem-cell transplantation refers to transplantation of hematopoietic stem cells (HSC) from a donor into a recipient. HSCs are immature cells that can develop into any of the three types of blood cells (red cells, white cells or platelets). HSCT can be either autologous (using the individual's own stem cells) or allogeneic (using stem cells from a donor).

Myeloablative chemotherapy is high-dose chemotherapy that kills cells in the bone marrow, including cancer cells. It is proposed to lower the number of normal blood-forming cells in the bone marrow. Myeloablative chemotherapy is usually followed by a bone marrow or stem cell transplant to rebuild the bone marrow. The use of high-dose chemotherapy with autologous hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation (HSCT) for solid tumors in children is based on the hypothesis that major dose escalations within the myeloablative range are needed to overcome tumor cell resistance and produce a meaningful clinical improvement. Stem-cell support following autologous transplantation may allow for an increase in the dose well beyond normal bone marrow tolerance. Research has suggested a correlation between dose-intensity of chemotherapy, and response rate and outcome in a variety of solid tumors; however, high-quality controlled trial data are limited or lacking, in part due to the relative rare occurrences of these tumors.

On behalf of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Ratko et al. (2012) published a comparative effectiveness systematic review of the benefits and harms of HSCT compared to standard chemotherapy for a number of childhood diseases, including Wilms’ tumors, retinoblastoma, Ewing sarcoma family of tumors, and rhabdomyosarcoma. The report was based on research by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association Technology Evaluation Center (TEC) Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC). Data regarding comparison of standard-dose chemotherapy and HSCT were limited. Evidence published in the peer-reviewed literature consisted of case series and case reports, with small, heterogeneous patient populations. The authors noted that there was moderate strength evidence suggesting no benefit to overall survival for single HSCT for metastatic rhabdomyosarcoma compared to conventional chemotherapy, and low strength evidence suggesting no benefit to overall survival for HSCT for extracutaneous retinoblastoma with central nervous system involvement, high-risk Ewing’s sarcoma family of tumors, and high-risk, relapsed Wilms’ tumor compared to conventional therapy. The authors also noted that evidence demonstrating benefit or harm of HSCT versus standard therapies or disease natural history was insufficient for most diseases affecting children.

**Contraindications to Transplantation**

Many factors affect the outcome of tissue transplantation. The selection process is designed to obtain the best result for each individual. Relative contraindications to HSC transplantation include but are not limited to:

- poor cardiac function (ejection fraction less than 45%)
- poor liver function (bilirubin greater than 2.0 mg/dl and transaminases greater than two times normal), unless related to disease
- poor renal function (creatinine clearance less than 50 ml/min)
- poor pulmonary function (diffusion capacity less than 60% of predicted)
- presence of human immunodeficiency virus or of an active form of hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HTLV-1

**Wilms’ Tumor**

Wilms’ tumor, also called nephroblastoma, is the most common cause of kidney cancer in children. Although generally considered curable, with a four-year overall survival rate of 90%, children with stages II, III, and IV anaplastic-histology tumors have a very poor prognosis upon recurrence (National Cancer Institute [NCI], 2016; Russell, 2008). Because relapse is rare and individuals in relapse have a poor prognosis, it is unlikely that randomized controlled clinical trials (RCTs) will be conducted in this patient population.

**Literature Review:** The published, peer-reviewed literature involving the use of dose-intensive chemotherapy for the treatment of Wilms’ tumor consists of case series with small patient populations, and few direct comparisons between conventional intensive chemotherapy and HSCT. Results regarding benefit to event-free-survival (EFS) and overall survival (OS) are mixed; however, there are some data suggesting a survival benefit with high-dose chemotherapy and autologous HSCT for relapsed disease (Presson, 2010; Spreafico, 2008; Campbell, 2004). EFS and OS rates range from 56–60%, and 53%–73%, respectively, at variable time intervals.
Presson et al. (2010) published an individual patient data meta-analysis collected from six studies involving a total of 100 patients with relapsed disease who received chemotherapy and autologous HSCT. These data were compared to outcomes of 118 patients from two studies who received salvage chemotherapy ± radiation therapy (CT). Four-year overall survival (OS) rates of patients treated with autologous HSCT were 54.1%. Patients with lung-only relapse who were treated with autologous HSCT had a four-year OS of 77.7% compared with those who had multiple relapses or relapsed at other sites (41.6%). Four-year survival rates among stage I-II patients were about 30% higher with CT than those treated with HSCT, but outcomes were comparable for stage III-IV patients. The authors noted that the findings suggested that salvage chemotherapy is typically the better choice for relapsed Wilms’ tumor patients, HSCT could be considered for stage III-IV patients with a lung-only relapse.

Summary for Wilms’ Tumor: Although not robust, there are some data suggesting improved survival over standard treatment in selected patients with Wilms’ tumor who are treated with high-dose chemotherapy and autologous HSCT. Autologous HSCT is considered an acceptable treatment option for relapsed Wilms’ tumor.

Retinoblastoma
Retinoblastoma is a relatively uncommon tumor of childhood that arises in the retina. There are several staging systems currently being used in the treatment of retinoblastoma; however, for treatment purposes, the disease is categorized as either intraocular or extraocular. Intraocular retinoblastoma is a localized disease with a high chance of survival. However, extraocular retinoblastoma can metastasize beyond the eye, most commonly into the central nervous system (CNS) and has a higher mortality rate. Prognosis is generally poorer in children in whom diagnosis is made beyond the age of five years. Treatment options for extraocular retinoblastoma include chemotherapy and radiation therapy (NCI, 2016).

Literature Review: Several prospective case series and retrospective studies have suggested the safety and effectiveness of autologous HSCT for the treatment of non-CNS metastatic retinoblastoma (Lee, 2008; Kremens, 2005; Rodriguez-Galindo, 2003; Dunkel, 2000). Treatment-related mortality was zero for all studies. In the study by Lee involving 14 children with bilateral disease, vision was preserved in one eye for nine patients and in both eyes for two patients; without the use of external beam radiation. Disease-free survival (DFS) ranged from 42–107 months.

Professional Societies/Organizations: Regarding trilateral retinoblastoma, NCI (2016) noted that current strategies are directed towards avoiding irradiation by using intensive chemotherapy followed by consolidation with myeloablative chemotherapy and autologous hematopoietic progenitor cell rescue. Regarding the treatment of patients with retinoblastoma with central nervous system disease, NCI states that high-dose marrow-ablative chemotherapy and autologous hematopoietic progenitor cell rescue has been explored, but its role is not yet clear. Regarding extracranial retinoblastoma, NCI notes that small studies have shown that metastatic retinoblastoma can be cured using high-dose marrow-ablative chemotherapy and autologous hematopoietic stem cell rescue.

Summary for Non-CNS Retinoblastoma: Because metastatic retinoblastoma is rare and prognosis is usually poor, it is unlikely that RCTs will be conducted for this population. The evidence from prospective case series suggests that high-dose chemotherapy and autologous hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation (HSCT) offers improved outcomes for selected children with non-central nervous system (CNS) metastatic retinoblastoma. Although data are limited, autologous HSCT appears to be an acceptable treatment option for this indication.

Ewing Family of Tumors
Ewing family of tumors (EFTs) are found in the bone (e.g., Ewing tumor of bone, ETB, or Ewing sarcoma of bone), or in soft tissue. EFTs belong to the group of neoplasms commonly referred to as small, round, blue-cell tumors of childhood. Children and adolescents with localized disease may have occult metastasis.

The prognosis for patients with high-risk tumors treated with conventional chemotherapy, radiation and surgery remain poor, with long-term survival rates for patients with metastatic disease less than 35% (Ratko, 2012). Children with relapsed Ewing tumors have a 10-year survival of 10% with standard chemotherapy, while patients with metastasis have a four-year overall survival of 39% (Barrett, 2010). High-dose chemotherapy and autologous HSCT has been studied in relapsed or metastatic Ewing tumors in an effort to increase survival rates.
These tumors are very sensitive to alkylators, a group of agents with a very steep dose-response curve, which provides the basis for the use of consolidation with myeloablative therapy and autologous HSCT (Dome, 2008). Dome (2008) also noted that the results of treatment with megatherapy and HSCT for patients with high-risk Ewing family of tumors must be analyzed with caution because of the lack of randomized studies and the heterogeneity of patients and treatments. Results of most retrospective European and American studies do not seem to support the use of this approach. In more recent results reported by the European Bone Marrow Transplant Registry; however, conditioning regimens that incorporate high doses of alkylating agents, generally busulfan and melphalan, confer an apparent survival advantage.

**Literature Review:** Several uncontrolled trials demonstrated improved or equivalent survival outcomes with autologous HSCT (Ferrari, 2011; Ladenstein, 2010; Gardener, 2008; Rosenthal, 2008; McTiernan, 2006; Barker, 2005). Ferrari et al. (2011) reported results of the Italian Sarcoma Group/Scandinavian Sarcoma Group III protocol, a multicenter, multi-country clinical trial involving 300 participants with Ewing family of tumors. At a median follow-up of 64 months, five-year overall survival (OS) and event-free survival (EFS) were 75% and 69%, respectively. Five-year EFS for those treated with high-dose therapy (HDT) were 75% for good responders and 72% for partial responders, and 33% for partial responders who did not receive HDT.

Ladenstein et al. (2010) published results from the Euro-EWING-99 Trial which analyzed outcomes of 281 patients with primary disseminated multifocal Ewing sarcoma treated with multiple cycles of chemotherapy, local treatment consisting of surgery or radiation, and high-dose chemotherapy followed by autologous HSCT. Of 281 total patients, 169 received HSCT. After a median follow-up of 3.8 years, three-year event-free survival (EFS) and OS for all patients were 27% and 34%, respectively. Estimated three-year OS from the start of HSCT for 46 children <14 years was 46%. At time of study analysis, 93 of 281 were still alive; 64 of these patients had received HSCT. Eighty-two percent of patients without HSCT died after a median of one year, with another seven deaths beyond the second year. The data suggested a benefit to OS with the use of HSCT in this patient population.

Gardner et al. (2008) reported results of 116 patients with Ewing sarcoma who underwent autologous HSCT. One hundred-day and one-year probabilities of treatment-related mortality were 4% and 9%, respectively. Five-year probabilities of relapse or progression-free survival (PFS) with localized and metastatic disease at diagnosis were 49% and 34%, respectively, compared with 51% and 60%, respectively for patients with localized or metastatic disease who received HSCT as first-line therapy.

Rosenthal et al. (2008) analyzed outcomes of 20 patients with high-risk Ewing family of tumors who underwent high-dose chemotherapy and autologous HSCT, and a cohort of thirteen who received a second cycle of chemotherapy and HSCT. For the entire group the probabilities of OS at one- and three-years were 60% and 45%, respectively. The estimated probabilities for EFS at one-, and three-years were 45% and 47%, respectively. In patients who completed only one cycle of high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT the probability of OS was 43% compared with 69% for patients who received both cycles of high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT.

**Professional Societies/Organizations:** For Ewing family of tumors (EFT), NCI (2017) notes that several trials have examined the role of high-dose chemotherapy with HSCT as consolidation treatment. Multiple small studies that reported benefit for HSCT have been published but are difficult to interpret because only patients who have a good initial response to standard chemotherapy are considered for HSCT. Clinical trials are ongoing. For metastatic disease, NCI states that more intensive therapies, many of which incorporate high-dose chemotherapy with or without total-body irradiation in conjunction with stem cell support, have not shown improvement in event-free survival (EFS) rates for patients with bone and/or bone marrow metastases. HSCT for patients with lung metastases is under investigation. NCI also notes that there is no evidence at this time to conclude that myeloablative therapy is superior to standard chemotherapy for the treatment of recurrent EFT. Further, event-free survival (EFS) was not improved with the use of allogeneic HSCT compared with autologous HSCT. Allogeneic HSCT was also associated with a higher complication rate.

**Summary for Ewing Family of Tumors:** In view of the universally poor prognosis, high-dose chemotherapy and autologous HSCT appears to be an appropriate treatment goal for individuals with minimal, responsive disease following conventional second-line therapy for progression or relapse (McTiernan, 2006). Although data are not robust, the published peer-reviewed scientific literature suggests that high-dose chemotherapy with autologous
HSCT may result in improved outcomes for a selected group of children with Ewing family of tumors and it is considered an acceptable therapy for this indication.

**Extracranial Germ-Cell Tumors**
Germ-cell tumors, which are relatively rare in childhood, develop from primordial germ cells that may migrate to locations outside of the yolk sac and subsequently develop into cancerous tumors. Prognosis and appropriate treatment depend upon factors such as histology, age, stage of disease, and primary site. Conventional treatment for extracranial germ-cell tumors is based on risk level in order to minimize treatment-related morbidity.

According to the National Cancer Institute ([NCI], 2017), only a small number of children and adolescents with extracranial germ-cell tumors experience relapse of disease after treatment with surgery and chemotherapy. There is no standard treatment for recurrent tumors, and prognosis is poor.

**Literature Review:** Data are limited in the published, peer-reviewed scientific literature regarding the role of HSCT for this indication. Trials of high-dose chemotherapy with autologous HSCT have been conducted in adults with good results in individuals with certain types of recurrent testicular cancer, which is of germ cell type.

**Professional Societies/Organizations:** Regarding recurrent childhood malignant extracranial germ cell tumors (GCT), NCI (2017) states that the role of high-dose chemotherapy and hematopoietic stem cell rescue for recurrent pediatric GCT is not established, despite anecdotal reports.

**Summary for Extracranial Germ-Cell Tumors:** There is insufficient evidence to support the similarity between pediatric and adult extracranial germ-cell tumor such that the evaluation of treatment in adults can be applied to children. The differences between children and adults regarding the location of the primary germ cell tumor site, pattern of relapse, and the biology of childhood germ cell tumors may limit the applicability of adult salvage approaches to children. At this time the role of high-dose chemotherapy with autologous HSCT for the treatment of extracranial germ-cell tumors in children has not been established.

**Childhood Soft Tissue Sarcoma**
Soft tissue sarcomas (STS) are a group of malignant tumors that originate from primitive mesenchymal tissue. These sarcomas account for seven percent of all childhood tumors, and include rhabdomyosarcoma, and non-rhabdomyosarcoma (NRSTS). Treatment options include surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy.

Bui-Nguyen et al. (2011) published results of a randomized open phase III clinical trial which evaluated whether high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT could improve OS in chemosensitive patients with advanced or metastatic soft tissue sarcoma. Eighty-seven patients received standard-dose chemotherapy ([SD], n=46) or high-dose chemotherapy plus HSCT ([HD], n=41). Median follow-up was 55.7 months. At the time of analysis, 27 patients (58.7%) in the SD group and 24 patients (58.5%) in the HD group had died. Three-year OS was 49.4% for the standard-dose group versus 32.7% for the high-dose arm (hazard ratio 1.26, 95% confidence interval 0.70–2.29). Progression-free survival was 32.4% and 14.0%, respectively, for the SD and HD groups. High-dose treatment led to higher grades of toxicity. OS was not improved for patients receiving intensified treatments with HSCT compared to patients receiving SD chemotherapy. Data suggested there is no OS benefit for high-dose therapy plus HSCT for patients with advanced or metastatic STS.

**Rhabdomyosarcoma:** Childhood rhabdomyosarcoma is a malignant soft tissue tumor of skeletal muscle origin which is most commonly found in the head and neck, genitourinary tract, and the extremities. Prognosis is related to the age of the child, site of origin, resectability, extent of any metastasis and tissues involvement, histopathology of the tumor, and unique biological characteristics of rhabdomyosarcoma cells. Treatment includes systemic chemotherapy with surgery and/or radiation therapy to maximize local control. Infants may do poorly because their bone marrow is less tolerant of chemotherapy doses that older children can receive and may be less likely to receive radiation therapy for local control and therefore have a high rate of local failure (NCI, 2017).

High-dose chemotherapy with autologous HSCT for the treatment of rhabdomyosarcoma is under clinical evaluation in children. Available data indicate that this is of no benefit in poor-risk rhabdomyosarcoma and should be only used in the context of a clinical trial. According to NCI (2017), high-dose chemotherapy with stem
cell rescue has been evaluated in a limited number of patients with rhabdomyosarcoma and has failed to improve the outcome of patients with newly diagnosed or recurrent rhabdomyosarcoma. Very intensive chemotherapy followed by autologous bone marrow reinfusion is under investigation for patients with recurrent rhabdomyosarcoma. A review of the published data did not determine a significant benefit for patients who underwent this salvage treatment approach. End-intensification with high-dose chemotherapy, dose intensification of alkylating agents, and integration of novel agents failed to improve survival in these patients (Wang, 2011).

Literature Review
Admiraal et al. (2011) performed a systematic review regarding the safety and effectiveness of the use of high-dose chemotherapy and autologous stem-cell rescue compared with standard chemotherapy. No randomized controlled trials were identified. All studies had severe methodological limitations; selection bias could not be excluded. The authors found no evidence that supported the use of high-dose chemotherapy as a standard therapy for metastatic rhabdomyosarcoma.

Pienemann et al. (2011) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of pooled results of 40 studies involving high-dose chemotherapy and autologous hematopoietic stem-cell transplantation. The study population consisted of 287 patients with metastatic rhabdomyosarcoma. The risk of bias in all studies was high due to methodological flaws. The three-year overall survival (OS) ranged from 22% to 53% in the transplant groups compared with 18% to 55% in the control groups. Meta-analysis on OS in controlled trials showed no difference between treatments. The authors concluded that use of this therapy was not justified except in appropriately-designed clinical trials.

Carli et al. (2004) presented data on the final results from two European intergroup studies designed to identify prognostic variables and determine the value of high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT for patients with rhabdomyosarcoma in complete remission. The two studies were run consecutively. The first study treated 62 patients with four cycles of standard chemotherapy. The second study treated 53 patients with three cycles of standard chemotherapy and one cycle of high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT. The estimated five-year OS rate for patients undergoing HSCT was not statistically improved over that for patients receiving standard chemotherapy (36% vs. 27%, respectively).

Matsubara et al. (2003) documented a series of 22 patients with intermediate-risk or high-risk rhabdomyosarcoma treated with high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT. All of the patients survived the treatment; however, eight of the patients who had high-risk disease at the time of HSCT died of recurrent or progressive disease. The five-year OS for all patients was 45%. The five-year OS rate for the 14 patients who underwent HSCT in complete remission was 70%, whereas the five-year OS rate for the eight patients who underwent HSCT in partial remission or with progressive disease was 0%.

Weigel et al. (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 22 studies documenting outcomes of 389 patients who were treated with HSCT for high-risk rhabdomyosarcoma. Patients treated in first complete or partial remission had an overall survival rate of 20–40% at two—six years after diagnosis. Patients treated during subsequent remissions or with residual disease had worse outcomes, with three-year OS estimated at 12%. The analysis did not demonstrate a survival advantage for patients with high-risk rhabdomyosarcoma treated with high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT.

Professional Societies/Organizations: Regarding high risk rhabdomyosarcoma NCI (2017) states that HSCT has been evaluated in a limited number of individuals with rhabdomyosarcoma. Improved outcomes have not been seen with use of HSCT for this indication.

Summary for Rhabdomyosarcoma: There is insufficient evidence in the published peer-reviewed scientific literature to support the effectiveness of high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT in children with high-risk rhabdomyosarcoma. The role of HSCT for this indication has not yet been established.

Non-Rhabdomyosarcomatous Soft Tissue Sarcomas (NRSTS): NRSTS are a heterogeneous group of tumors that include neoplasms of the smooth muscle, connective and vascular tissue, and the peripheral nervous system. Subtypes include alveolar soft part sarcoma (ASPS), desmoplastic small round cell tumor, clear
cell sarcoma of soft parts, hemangioendotheliomas, and angiosarcomas. Standard treatment options include surgical resection, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy, although use of adjuvant chemotherapy is controversial for some subtypes of childhood sarcoma.

**Literature Review**

There are insufficient data regarding the safety and effectiveness of high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT for this indication. Peinemann et al. (2011, updated 2017) conducted a systematic review of randomized controlled trials to assess the safety and efficacy of high-dose chemotherapy (HDCT) followed by autologous hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT) for all stages of non-rhabdomyosarcoma soft tissue sarcomas (NRSTS) in children and adults. A total of 54 studies with 177 participants who received HSCT and 69 participants who received standard care met inclusion criteria. The limited data of a single randomized controlled trial with an unclear risk of bias and moderate to high quality evidence showed no survival advantage for HDCT. Due to a lack of comparative studies, it is unclear whether participants with NRSTS have improved survival from treatment with autologous HSCT following high-dose chemotherapy. The authors concluded that autologous HSCT for NRSTS should only be used within controlled trials. The 2017 update did not reveal any new studies.

In a study of individuals with ASPS, Ogose et al. (2003) documented outcomes in a multicenter case series of 57 adult and pediatric patients with ASPS treated over the course of 20 years. Chemotherapy was performed in 47 patients with different regimens. Two patients who were treated with intra-arterial chemotherapy regimens experienced a partial response. There was no response in patients treated with high-dose ifosfamide or cisplatin. None of the patients with metastatic disease responded to chemotherapy of any type. The results suggest that high doses of chemotherapy are not beneficial in the treatment of ASPS.

**Summary for Non-Rhabdomyosarcomatous Soft Tissue Sarcomas (NRSTS):** There is insufficient evidence to support the safety and effectiveness of high-dose chemotherapy and HSCT for the treatment of children with NRSTS, including alveolar soft part sarcoma. The role of this therapy has not yet been established for this indication.

**Use Outside of the US:** No relevant information.

**Coding/Billing Information**

**Note:** 1) This list of codes may not be all-inclusive.

2) Deleted codes and codes which are not effective at the time the service is rendered may not be eligible for reimbursement.

**Considered Medically Necessary when criteria in the applicable policy statements listed above are met:**

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†Note: Experimental, investigational and unproven when used to report allogeneic bone marrow or blood-derived stem cell procedures.


References


