



Corporate Medical Policy

Co-Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, and Assistant-at-Surgery Guidelines

File Name: co-surgeon_assistant_surgeon_and_assistant_at_surgery_guidelines
Origination: 01/2000
Last Review: 07/2009
Next Review: 07/2010

Description of Procedure or Service

Co-Surgeons are defined as two or more surgeons, usually from different specialties, where the participation of both surgeons is necessary in performing a specific operative procedure. This may be necessary due to the complex nature of the procedure(s) and/or the patient's condition. Co-Surgeons may also be of the same specialty, or may be of different specialties operating on separate body systems. Co-Surgery is always performed during the same operative session. Co-Surgeons may also be referred to as a Surgical Team.

An assistant surgeon is defined as a physician who actively assists the operating surgeon in the performance of a surgical procedure. In this case, one physician is acting as the surgeon and the other is acting as an assistant. This may be necessary because of the complex nature of the procedure(s) or the patient's condition. The assistant surgeon performs medical functions under the direct supervision of the operating physician. The assistant is usually in the same specialty.

A physician assistant/nurse practitioner/nurse midwife can serve as an assistant at surgery.

Policy

Co-Surgeons: Benefits are allowed for medically necessary procedures and allowance(s) will be determined on an individual consideration basis.

Assistant Surgeon: Benefits are allowed when medical necessity and appropriateness of assistant surgeon services are met. The assistant surgeon benefit for a covered procedure is 20% of the maximum allowed for the procedure.

Physician Assistant/Nurse Practitioner/Nurse Midwife: Benefits are allowed when medical necessity and appropriateness of assistant surgeon services are met, and when the physician assistant/nurse practitioner/nurse midwife is under the direct supervision of a physician. Separate benefits will not be allowed for the hospital-employed physician assistant/nurse practitioner/nurse midwife. The physician assistant/nurse practitioner/nurse midwife benefit for a covered procedure is 85% of the maximum allowed for an assistant surgeon.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina uses ClaimCheck® guidelines as its primary source for determining those procedures available for assistant surgeon benefits.

Benefits Application

Please refer to Certificate for availability of benefits. This policy relates only to the services or supplies described herein. Benefits may vary according to benefit design, therefore certificate language should be

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reviewed before applying the terms of the policy.

When Co-Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, and Physician Assistant/Nurse Practitioner/Nurse Midwife Services are covered

• **Co-Surgeons or Surgical Team**

Services by surgeons of different specialties performing procedures on separate body systems will be allowed at 100% of the maximum allowance for the primary procedure performed by each surgeon. An additional 20% may be allowed if the surgeons of different specialties assisted each other and criteria for assistant surgeon services are met.

Services by surgeons of the same specialty will be allowed at 100% of the maximum allowance for the primary procedure performed. An additional 20% will be allowed if criteria for assistant surgeon services are met. The total allowance for the operative session will be divided equally between the surgeons.

Services rendered by surgeons of different specialties who are performing the approach in order for the other surgeon to have access enabling performance of the primary procedure may be allowed on an individual consideration basis.

• **Assistant Surgeon**

An assistant surgeon must be appropriately board-certified or otherwise highly qualified as a skilled surgeon, and licensed as a physician in the state where the services are provided.

• **Physician Assistant/Nurse Practitioner/Nurse Midwife**

A physician assistant/nurse practitioner/nurse midwife must be appropriately certified or licensed in the state where the services are provided, and be credentialed in the facility where the procedure is performed.

When Co-Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, and Physician Assistant/Nurse Practitioner/Nurse Midwife Services are not covered

- Services will not be covered if the above criteria are not met.
- Physicians will not be allowed additional benefits for the supervision of a physician assistant/nurse practitioner/nurse midwife.
- RN-First Assistants are not eligible for reimbursement as surgical assistants.

Policy Guidelines

- Refer to Multiple Procedure and Bundling guidelines for procedures performed in addition to the primary procedure(s) during the same operative session.
- When multiple procedures are performed and the secondary procedures are allowable according to the multiple procedure guidelines, but not individually eligible for assistant surgeon services, benefits for those services may be allowed on an individual consideration basis.
- On occasion, a procedure not allowed assistant surgeon benefits may be unusually complex for a particular patient and warrant assistant surgeon services. These cases will be reviewed on an individual consideration basis.

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- When a surgeon is unexpectedly requested to render services during an ongoing operative session, claims will be reviewed according to the above criteria.

Billing/Coding/Physician Documentation Information

This policy may apply to the following codes. Inclusion of a code in this section does not guarantee that it will be reimbursed. For further information on reimbursement guidelines, please see Administrative Policies on the Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina web site at www.bcbsnc.com. They are listed in the Category Search on the Medical Policy search page.

Applicable Codes:

Co-Surgeon modifiers are -62 or -66.

Assistant surgeon modifiers are -80, -81, or -82.

Physician assistant/Nurse Practitioner/Nurse Midwife modifier is -AS.

Claims for more than one surgeon should have each surgeon's provider identification number.

Claims and medical records for all providers in the operative session may be required.

Medical Term Definitions

Not Applicable

Scientific Background and Reference Sources

Medical Policy Advisory Group 3/01

Specialty Matched Consultant Advisory Panel - 9/2002

Medical Policy Advisory Group - 10/2003

Medical Policy Advisory Group - 03/10/2005

Medical Policy Advisory Group - 03/24/2006

Policy Implementation/Update Information

1/00	Implementation
3/00	Reference to Blue Edge removed.
3/01	Medical Policy Advisory Group Review. No change in policy
5/01	Changes in formatting.
11/01	Coding format change.
10/02	Specialty Matched Consultant Advisory Panel review. RN-First Assistant identified as not eligible for reimbursement as an assistant surgeon.
10/03	Medical Policy Advisory Group review. Reformatted sections for appearance. Reaffirmed policy.
11/03	Benefit Application section corrected.

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- 03/03/05 For consistency added " Blue Care, Blue Choice, Blue Options and Classic Blue to the Policy statement. Policy changed to state "Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina uses the American College of Surgeons as its primary source for determining those procedures available for assistant surgeon benefits" for Blue Care, Blue Choice, Blue Options and Classic Blue Products. Policy guidelines changed to "When multiple procedures are performed and the secondary procedures are allowable according to the multiple procedure guidelines, but not individually eligible for assistant surgeon services, benefits for those services may be allowed on an individual consideration basis." and "On occasion, a procedure not allowed assistant surgeon benefits may be unusually complex for a particular patient and warrant assistant surgeon services. These cases will be reviewed on an individual consideration basis." Notice given 03/03/2005. Medical Policy Advisory Group reviewed policy on 03/10/2005. Effective date 05/05/2005.
- 5/08/06 Medical Policy Advisory Group review 3/24/06. No change to policy.
- 9/10/07 No change to policy. Medical Policy reviewed 08/17/07 by Senior Medical Director of Provider Partnerships, Medical and Reimbursement Policy.
- 12/22/08 Revised statement "Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina uses the American College of Surgeons as its primary source for determining those procedures available for assistant surgeon benefits to "Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina uses ClaimCheck® guidelines as its primary source for determining those procedures available for assistant surgeon benefits. Medical policy reviewed 11/2008 by VP Senior Medical Director of Provider Partnerships, Medical and Reimbursement Policy.
- 02/16/09 Revised statement from "RN-First Assistants are not eligible for reimbursement as surgical assistants." to "RN-First Assistants and nurse practitioners are not eligible for reimbursement as surgical assistants." under the section titled "When Co-Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, and Services are not covered".
- 03/30/09 Added nurse practitioner as eligible to receive reimbursement as surgical assistant. Revised statement to "RN-First Assistants are not eligible for reimbursement as surgical assistants." under the section titled "When Co-Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, and Services are not covered." Policy title changed from "Co-Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, and Physician Assistant Guidelines" to "Co-Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon, and Assistant -at - Surgery Guidelines"
- 07/20/09 Added nurse midwife as eligible to receive reimbursement as surgical assistant. Remove references to Blue Care, Blue Choice, Blue Options and Classic Blue. Policy reviewed by VP/ Senior Medical Director of Provider Partnerships, Medical and Reimbursement Policy.
- 6/22/10 Policy Number(s) removed (amw)

Medical policy is not an authorization, certification, explanation of benefits or a contract. Benefits and eligibility are determined before medical guidelines and payment guidelines are applied. Benefits are determined by the group contract and subscriber certificate that is in effect at the time services are rendered. This document is solely provided for informational purposes only and is based on research of current medical literature and review of common medical practices in the treatment and diagnosis of disease. Medical practices and knowledge are constantly changing and BCBSNC reserves the right to review and revise its medical policies periodically.