

Policy on Third-party Reimbursement of Medical Fees Related to Sedation/General Anesthesia

Originating Committee
Dental Care Committee

Review Council
Council on Clinical Affairs

Adopted
1989

Reaffirmed
1993

Revised
1995, 2000, 2003

Purpose

To ensure that all children have access to the full range of dental delivery systems, the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) advocates that, if sedation or general anesthesia and related facility fees are payable benefits of a health care plan, these same benefits shall apply for the delivery of oral health services.

Methods

This policy is based on a review of the current dental literature related to guidelines for sedation and general anesthesia, as well as issues pertaining to medically necessary oral health care. Relevant policies and guidelines of the AAPD are included.

Background

For some infants, children, adolescents, and persons with special health care needs, treatment under sedation/general anesthesia in a hospital, outpatient facility, or dental office or clinic represents the only appropriate method to deliver necessary oral health care. The patient's age, dental needs, disabilities, medical conditions, and/or acute situational anxiety that render the child or adult unable to cooperate in the dental office may be an indication for treatment to be completed under sedation/general anesthesia.^{1,2} These patients may be denied access to oral health care when insurance companies refuse to provide reimbursement for sedation/general anesthesia and related facility services.

Most denials cite the procedure is not "medically necessary". This determination appears to be based on arbitrary and inconsistent criteria.³⁻⁷ For instance, medical policies often provide reimbursement for sedation/general anesthesia or facility fees related to myringotomy for a 3-year-old child, but deny these benefits when related to treatment of dental disease and/or infection for the same patient.

American Dental Association Resolution 1989-546 states that insurance companies should not deny benefits that would otherwise be payable "solely on the basis of the pro-

fessional degree and licensure of the dentist or physician providing treatment, if that treatment is provided by a legally qualified dentist or physician operating within the scope of his or her training and licensure".⁸

Policy statement

The AAPD strongly believes that only the dentist providing the oral health care for the patient can determine the medical necessity of sedation/general anesthesia.⁹

The AAPD encourages the insurance industry to:

1. recognize that sedation and/or general anesthesia is necessary to deliver compassionate, quality oral health care to some infants, children, adolescents, and persons with special health care needs;
2. include sedation, general anesthesia, and related facility services as benefits of health insurance without discrimination between the "medical" or "dental" nature of the procedure;
3. end arbitrary and unfair refusal of reimbursement for sedation, general anesthesia, and facility costs related to the delivery of oral health care;
4. regularly consult the AAPD with respect to the development of benefit plans that best serve the oral health interests of infants, children, adolescents, and patients with special care needs.¹⁰

References

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