

Expanded Coverage for Power Seat Elevation Systems—A “Win” for AAPM&R and the Specialty

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) published a National Coverage Decision (NCD) on May 16, 2023, that dramatically expands coverage of seat elevation systems in power wheelchairs for Medicare beneficiaries. This advancement comes after many years of advocacy from AAPM&R and physiatrists who treat patients that rely on seat elevation systems to perform daily activities.

The final NCD issued by CMS expands coverage for seat elevation in all Complex Rehabilitation Technology (CRT) power wheelchairs covered under the Medicare program (Category 2, 3, and 5). This expanded coverage applies to all Medicare beneficiaries who need seat elevation for assistance in transfers and to improve their reach while performing or participating in mobility related activities of daily living (MRADLs), such as grooming, dressing and bathing in the home.

“The decision by CMS to recognize power seat elevation systems as primarily medical in nature, expanding access for Medicare beneficiaries, is a significant step forward for patients that require access to these systems in order to live independent lives,” according to Anjali Shah, MD, FAAPMR. “Expanding access to these systems will promote safety, reduce medical comorbidities, provide privacy and integrity for the most basic human tasks, and open the door for many of the patients that I treat to achieve independence.”

Dr. Shah has been advocating since 2018 for CMS to expand access to power seat elevation and standing systems. This volunteer advocacy work has involved meeting with CMS officials to provide a physician’s perspective on policy proposals, reviewing draft statements and comments for both AAPM&R and interested coalitions, and participating in a 2022 briefing on Capitol Hill for interested members of Congress and Congressional staff on the need to expand Medicare coverage of power seat elevation and standing systems in power wheelchairs.

Dr. Shah is currently the Director of Wheelchair and Seating at UT Southwestern Medical Center, and treats many patients who will see the benefits of this NCD once it is implemented. Dr. Shah is also a member of AAPM&R’s Health Policy & Legislation Committee, and as such is active in numerous advocacy initiatives that seek to improve the quality of care available to her patients and the practice environment for physiatrists.

The release of this groundbreaking NCD follows CMS determining in February 2023 that the need for seat elevation systems is “primarily medical in nature,” and proposing that Medicare should cover these systems for Group 3 CRT power wheelchair users. AAPM&R submitted

comments in support of this first step, and asked CMS to go beyond the initial proposal to expand access for Group 2 CRT power wheelchair users and patients who would benefit from increased reach and improved line of sight provided through seat elevation. CMS received overwhelming support for this initial proposal, with more than 2,100 comments submitted before the comment period closed.

AAPM&R has also collaborated with other stakeholders to advocate for expanded coverage for seat elevation systems for power wheelchair users under the Medicare program. AAPM&R is a member of the Independence Through Enhancement of Medicare and Medicaid (ITEM) Coalition, a consumer and clinician-led coalition of more than 75 national organizations advocating for access to and coverage of assistive devices, technologies, and related services for persons with injuries, illnesses, disabilities, and chronic conditions of all ages. The ITEM Coalition submitted the initial request for CMS to begin consideration of expanding coverage of power seat elevation systems. AAPM&R assisted with the ITEM Coalition’s recent comments to CMS on the initial proposal to expand coverage.

This NCD represents a significant step forward in expanding equity and access to critically important medical technology for Medicare beneficiaries and will improve the quality-of-life for many patients that rely on power wheelchairs. **AAPM&R thanks CMS for taking this step forward and will continue to press for further progress through our advocacy efforts for patients. To learn more about our advocacy work, visit aapmr.org/advocacy.**



Dr. Shah (standing) advocating on Capitol Hill with a patient for Medicare coverage for seat elevation systems.

MEDPAGETODAY® Stay tuned for more on Academy initiatives focused on advocating for patients who rely on wheelchairs, including the impactful conversations led by our AAPM&R Delegation during the AMA House of Delegates Annual Meeting in next month’s issue of *The Physiatrist*. Read more here: medpagetoday.com/meetingcoverage/ama/104957.