02-40000-26

Original Effective Date: 02/15/16

Reviewed: 05/22/25

Revised: 01/01/26

Subject: Irreversible Electroporation (IRE)

THIS MEDICAL COVERAGE GUIDELINE IS NOT AN AUTHORIZATION, CERTIFICATION, EXPLANATION OF BENEFITS, OR A GUARANTEE OF PAYMENT, NOR DOES IT SUBSTITUTE FOR OR CONSTITUTE MEDICAL ADVICE. ALL MEDICAL DECISIONS ARE SOLELY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PATIENT AND PHYSICIAN. BENEFITS ARE DETERMINED BY THE GROUP CONTRACT, MEMBER BENEFIT BOOKLET, AND/OR INDIVIDUAL SUBSCRIBER CERTIFICATE IN EFFECT AT THE TIME SERVICES WERE RENDERED. THIS MEDICAL COVERAGE GUIDELINE APPLIES TO ALL LINES OF BUSINESS UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED IN THE PROGRAM EXCEPTIONS SECTION.

DESCRIPTION:

Irreversible electroporation (IRE) describes a process that uses application of brief, controlled, high-voltage direct current impulses to create multiple holes in cell membranes. This process irreversibly damages the cell's homeostasis mechanism, leading to instant cell death. IRE is most frequently performed in the liver, kidney, lung, prostate, and pancreas, and is also being used to treat metastatic disease in the liver.

The Nanoknife® Oncobionic System is a low-energy direct current thermal ablation system, which received initial Food and Drug Administration (FDA) 510K clearance in 2006, as a tissue ablation system indicated for surgical ablation of soft tissue, including cardiac and smooth muscle. Subsequent FDA clearance clarified the approved indications to "the surgical ablation of soft tissue". It has not received clearance for the therapy or treatment of any specific disease or condition.

Summary and Analysis of Evidence

George et al (2024) conducted an analysis to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the NanoKnife System to ablate prostate tissue in patients with intermediate-risk prostate cancer (PCa) [PRESERVE study (NCT04972097)]. At the time of analysis, the trial had completed accrual with preliminary follow-up available. The median (IQR) age at screening was 67.0 (61.0–72.0) years and Gleason distribution 3 + 4 (80.2%) and 4 + 3 (19.8%). At 6 months, all patients with available data (n = 74) experienced a median (IQR) percent reduction in PSA of 67.6% (52.3–82.2%). Only ten subjects (8.3%) experienced a Grade 3 adverse event; five were procedure-related. No Grade ≥ 4 adverse events (AEs) were reported. The authors stated, "this study supports prior findings that IRE prostate ablation with the NanoKnife System can be performed safely. Final results are required to fully assess oncological, functional, and safety outcomes." The authors also acknowledged several study limitations, stating "first, AE data are reported before all patients have achieved 12 months of follow-up. It is possible that patients could experience

additional AEs; however, it is anticipated that many AEs, especially severe ones, and any related to treatment, would occur in the peri-operative period included in this analysis. Given that almost 90% of subjects completed their 3-month visit and delayed AEs are unlikely, conclusions regarding the safety of the procedure are unlikely to change. Second, as a single-arm trial, there is no randomized comparator and all patients received the treatment under study, and therefore only outcomes related to IRE were observed. Additionally, there was no central imaging or pathology review. Imaging and pathology interpretation are inherently subjective and there exists known variability. However, the current study represents real-world practice, as even interpretation among providers within a single clinical site can vary. Lastly, while this study included patients with intermediate-risk PCa, there is heterogeneity even within this subgroup. For example, intermediate risk could further be subdivided into favorable and unfavorable risk based on stage and/or Gleason score. A majority of subjects in this study had stage T1c PCa and a Gleason of 3 + 4, which may have limited the generalizability of the results to men with intermediate-risk PCa of other severities." Geboers et al (2024) prospectively compared systemic anti-tumour immune responses induced by irreversible electroporation (IRE) and robot-assisted radical prostatectomy (RARP) in patients with localised intermediate-risk prostate cancer (PCa). Between February 2021 and June 2022, before and after treatment (at 5, 14 and 30 days) peripheral blood samples of 30 patients with localised PCa were prospectively collected. Patient inclusion criteria were: International Society of Urological Pathologists Grade 2–3, clinical cancer stage ≤T2c, prostate-specific antigen level <20 ng/mL. Patients were treated with IRE (n = 20) or RARP (n = 10). Frequency and activation status of lymphocytic and myeloid immune cell subsets were determined using flow cytometry. PCa-specific T-cell responses to prostatic acid phosphatase (PSAP) and cancer testis antigen (New York oesophageal squamous cell carcinoma 1 [NY-ESO-1]) were determined by interferon-γ enzyme-linked immunospot assay (ELISpot). Repeated-measures analysis of variance and two-sided Student's t-tests were used to compare immune responses over time and between treatment cohorts. Patient and tumour characteristics were similar between the cohorts except for age (median 68 years [IRE] and 62 years [RARP]). IRE induced depletion of systemic regulatory T cells and a simultaneous increase in activated cytotoxic T-lymphocyte antigen 4 (CTLA-4)+ cluster of differentiation (CD)4+ ($P < 0.001$) and CD8+ ($P = 0.032$) T cells, consistent with reduction of systemic immune suppression allowing for effector T-cell activation, peaking 14 days after IRE. Effects were positively correlated with tumour volume/ablation size. Accordingly, IRE induced expansion of PSAP and/or NY-ESO-1 specific T-cell responses in four of the eight immune competent patients. The authors concluded, "irreversible electroporation induces a PCa-specific systemic immune response in patients with localised PCa, aiding conversion of the tumour microenvironment into a more immune permissive state. Therapeutic efficacy might be further enhanced by combination with CTLA-4 checkpoint inhibition, potentially opening up a new synergistic treatment paradigm for high-risk localised or (oligo)metastatic disease." Author acknowledged study limiltations included the relatively short follow-up time, restricting the number of events and the feasibility to associate immune parameters with long-term oncological outcome measures; and that tissue biopsies could have provided additional information about immune cell infiltration in the TME.

UpToDate review, "Nonsurgical local treatment strategies for colorectal cancer liver metastases" (Venook, Fidelman; 2025) states, "a systematic review included eight studies (five prospective phase II studies and three retrospective case cohorts) that included 162 patients with 283 CRC liver metastases <3 cm in size treated with IRE. Procedures were performed under general anesthesia with cardiac cycle synchronization and with the use of either CT or ultrasound for lesion localization. Probe spacing was

less than 3.2 cm for all ablations. Nonfatal cardiac arrhythmia occurred in nine (5.6 percent) patients. Six bile leaks and one late biliary stricture were reported. There were two procedure-related deaths. Procedure-related hemorrhage occurred in seven patients, with one patient requiring laparotomy to control bleeding. There were no reports of procedure-related liver failure. Local control lasted between zero months for patients with residual disease after IRE to up to 10 months. Progression-free survival ranged from 4 to 12 months. OS at 24 months was 61 to 62 percent for two of the studies and a third study reported a median OS of 2.7 years." Meijerink et al (2021) investigated the efficacy and safety of IRE for colorectal liver metastases (CRLMs) unsuitable for resection or thermal ablation because of proximity to critical structures and for further systemically administered treatments. A total of 51 participants (median age, 67 years [interquartile range, 62-75 years]; 37 men) underwent IRE. Of these 51 participants, 50 with a total of 76 CRLMs (median tumor size, 2.2 cm; range, 0.5-5.4 cm) were successfully treated in 62 procedures; in one participant, treatment was stopped prematurely because of pulse-induced cardiac arrhythmia. With a per-participant 1-year LTP-free survival of 68% (95% CI: 59, 84) according to competing risk analysis, the primary end point was met. Local control following repeat procedures was achieved in 74% of participants (37 of 50). Median overall survival from first IRE was 2.7 years (95% CI: 1.6, 3.8). The authors concluded that IRE was effective and relatively safe for colorectal liver metastases 5.0 cm or smaller that were unsuitable for partial hepatectomy, thermal ablation, or further systemic treatment. The reported results were limited by the lack of control group and blinding, as well as the use of concurrent procedures with IRE. In addition, the predefined threshold in the sample size calculation was chosen arbitrarily.

Seal et al (2025) evaluated the evidence for the use of IRE for treatment of pancreatic cancer and concluded "although the use of IRE opens up an interesting frontier in treating cases of locally advanced PanCa, further large-scale studies with appropriate controls and randomized control trials are needed before it can be adopted outside of research purposes. Prospective studies with significant sample sizes (we could not find any study with a sample size more than 10) are lacking for stage IV (metastatic) PanCa being treated with IRE. Therefore, evidence regarding improvement in overall survival in these patients is not available. Radiofrequency ablation remains the preferred ablation method for liver metastasis due to its relative safety and similar efficacy compared to IRE, except when metastasis is in close proximity to large vessels or bile ducts." Yang et al (2020) conducted a prospective trial for using IRE through surgical approaches for locally advanced pancreatic cancer (LAPC) in 11 medical centres in Asia, from 2012 to 2017. All related and treatment outcomes were analysed from a prospective database. 74 patients were enrolled. Thirty complications occurred in thirteen (17.6%) patients without mortality. The progression-free survival (PFS) rate at one year, three years, and five years were 69.1%, 48.7%, and 28.8%, and the overall survival (OS) rate at one year, three years, and five years were 97.2%, 53%, and 31.2%. The authors concluded that the study showed that combined induction chemotherapy and surgical IRE for LAPC is safe. For well-selected patients, IRE can achieve encouraging survival outcomes. However, the complication rate of 17.6% was not insignificant. Entry into this trial was limited to individuals who had responded to initial induction chemotherapy. Results may not apply to other individuals. Further prospective, randomized trials are warranted to fully understand the risks and benefits of IRE.

UpToDate review, "Localized hepatocellular carcinoma: Liver-directed therapies for nonsurgical candidates eligible for local ablation" (Curley et al, 2025) states. "where available, irreversible electroporation (IRE) represents a nonthermal ablation method that may be preferred over thermal

ablation techniques for lesions in a "risky" location, such as adjacent to blood vessels. However, in our view, further studies with more patients and longer follow-up durations are needed to assess the long-term efficacy of this ablation method before it can be applied with the same confidence as RFA or MWA. Few data are available for treatment of HCC; most series that describe IRE treatment for liver tumors include both primary liver tumors (HCC, cholangiocarcinoma) and hepatic metastases, and most suffer from limited numbers of HCC patients and short follow-up. The best data for HCC come from a retrospective single-center case series of 75 tumors treated with IRE in 58 patients. Patients were largely deemed poor candidates for other ablation procedures because of tumor location or poor general condition. Overall, 58 (77 percent), 67 (89 percent), and 69 (92 percent) of the 75 treated tumors were completely ablated after one, two, or three IRE procedures, respectively. At a median follow-up of nine months, the 6- and 12-month local progression-free survival rates were 87 and 70 percent, respectively. Complications occurred in 11 patients and included three patients with liver failure in the setting of Child-Turcotte-Pugh class B cirrhosis; one died." Verloh et al (2019) compared the frequency of adverse events of thermal microwave (MWA) and radiofrequency ablation (RFA) with non-thermal irreversible electroporation (IRE) in percutaneous ablation of hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC). 117 MWA/RFA and 47 IRE procedures (one tumor treated per procedure; 144 men and 20 women; median age, 66 years) were analyzed regarding adverse events, duration of hospital and intensive care unit (ICU) stays and occurrence of a post-ablation syndrome. 70.1% of the RFA/MWA and 63.8% of the IRE procedures were performed without complications. Shortcomings of this study included the retrospective nature, lack of randomization, and lack of blinding.

UpToDate review, "Image-guided ablation of lung tumors" (Dupuy, 2025) states, "irreversible electroporation (IRE) is a novel ablation technology being investigated for the treatment of solid malignancies. It utilizes direct electrical pulses to create nanoscale defects or pores in cell membranes; these defects disrupt cellular homeostasis leading to apoptotic cell death. Electroporation can either be reversible or irreversible, the latter leading to cell death. There is one IRE system approved for use in the United States. The system utilizes monopolar electrodes with a retractable sheath, which allows the active tip to be adjusted between 1 and 4 cm. The generator allows for the simultaneous use of up to six electrodes with a maximum delivery of 50 A and 3000 V. Since IRE is a non-thermal ablation technique, its purported benefits include overcoming the heat sink effect and the ability to treat near bronchovascular structures without causing structural injury. Theoretically, IRE would be a well-suited ablation modality for lung lesions close to the chest wall, hilum, and mediastinum due to the low potential for collateral structural damage. To date, there have been few published clinical studies evaluating electroporation of lung tissue in humans. One study was a prospective trial across two academic centers named the ALICE trial. This trial was stopped prematurely due to failing to meet expected efficacy at interim analysis based on high recurrence rates in 61 percent within one year of treatment."

POSITION STATEMENT:

Irreversible electroporation (IRE), including the use of the NanoKnife® system, is considered **experimental or investigational** for all indications, including, but not limited to, ablation of soft tissue or of solid organs, such as the liver, pancreas, and prostate.

There is insufficient clinical peer reviewed literature demonstrating the safety, efficacy, and the effects of irreversible electroporation (IRE), on long-term health outcomes.

BILLING/CODING INFORMATION:

CPT Coding

47384	Ablation, irreversible electroporation, liver, 1 or more tumors, including imaging guidance, percutaneous **(Investigational)**
55877	Ablation, irreversible electroporation, prostate, 1 or more tumors, including imaging guidance, percutaneous **(Investigational)**
0600T	Ablation, irreversible electroporation; 1 or more tumors per organ, other than liver or prostate, including imaging guidance, when performed, percutaneous **(Investigational)**
0601T	Ablation, irreversible electroporation; 1 or more tumors per organ, including fluoroscopic and ultrasound guidance, when performed, open **(Investigational)**

REIMBURSEMENT INFORMATION:

Refer to section entitled **POSITION STATEMENT**.

PROGRAM EXCEPTIONS:

Federal Employee Program (FEP): Follow FEP guidelines.

State Account Organization (SAO): Follow SAO guidelines.

Medicare Advantage products: No National Coverage Determination (NCD) and/or Local Coverage Determination (LCD) were found at the time of the last guideline review date.

If this Medical Coverage Guideline contains a step therapy requirement, in compliance with Florida law 627.42393, members or providers may request a step therapy protocol exemption to this requirement if based on medical necessity. The process for requesting a protocol exemption can be found at Coverage Protocol Exemption Request

DEFINITIONS:

Electroporation: a cell is subjected to a powerful electrical field using high-voltage direct current (up to 3 kV); this creates multiple holes in the cell membrane and irreversibly damages the cell's homeostasis mechanism, leading to instant cell death.

RELATED GUIDELINES:

Radiofrequency and Microwave Ablation of Liver Tumors, 02-40000-23

Radiofrequency Ablation of Solid Tumors Other Than Liver Tumors, 02-99221-13

OTHER:

Index terms:

Note: The use of specific product names is illustrative only. It is not intended to be a recommendation of one product over another, and is not intended to represent a complete listing of all products available.

IRE
NanoKnife®
Oncobionic System
Soft tissue ablation

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL:

This Medical Coverage Guideline (MCG) was approved by the Florida Blue Medical Policy and Coverage Committee on 05/22/25.

GUIDELINE UPDATE INFORMATION:

02/15/16	New Medical Coverage Guideline.
03/15/17	Scheduled review. Maintained position statement. Updated references.
03/15/18	Scheduled review. Position statement maintained; updated references.
04/15/19	Scheduled review. Position statement maintained; updated references.
04/15/20	Scheduled review. Maintained position statement and updated references.
07/01/20	Quarterly CPT/HCPCS coding update. Added codes 0600T, 0601T.
01/01/21	Annual CPT/HCPCS coding update. Revised 0601T.
06/15/21	Scheduled review. Maintained position statement and updated references.
12/15/21	Revision. Updated references and maintained position statement.
06/15/23	Scheduled review. Maintained position statement and updated references.
06/15/24	Scheduled review. Revised description. Maintained position statement and updated references.

06/15/25	Scheduled review. Updated references, revised description and maintained position statement (added specific indication of prostate cancer).
01/01/26	Annual CPT/HCPCS coding update. Added 47384, 55877, revised 0600T.