



March 28, 2001

To: John Shilts, Administrator, Workers' Compensation Section

From: The Medical Advisory Committee

Re: The IDET procedure

The Medical Advisory Committee has completed a thorough review of the status of Intradiscal Electrothermal Therapy in the treatment of disc pain. The Committee has reviewed the literature and listened to presentations by a number of interested parties. After completing this review and debating the information, the MAC makes the following findings and recommendations:

I. Issues

1. What defines whether a procedure is experimental or unproven?
2. Is the IDET procedure a successful procedure for treating chronic back pain?
3. Should WCD adopt a rule finding the IDET procedure non-reimbursable for the treatment of workers' compensation claimants?
4. What is chronic back pain?

II. The Problem:

IDET is a new procedure that is currently being promoted by some medical providers as an effective treatment for chronic low back pain. However, there is significant concern that this procedure has not undergone rigorous scientific investigation and therefore is experimental or unproven. There are no randomized studies of its effectiveness, no animal research regarding the long term effects of disc heating, and no evidence of long-term safety.

III. The interests:

- Physicians: Some may have a financial and personal interest in promoting its use.
- Insurers, employers, and hospitals have a financial interest.
- Injured workers and the general public have an interest in new techniques and in receiving safe and proven treatments.

IV. Proposed solutions:

1. A procedure is unproven if it has not been shown to be effective through rigorous controlled scientific studies.
2. The IDET procedure is unproven. It has not been demonstrated to be an effective treatment for chronic back pain through rigorous scientific studies, and should not be compensable under the Oregon workers' compensation system. There are continuing studies, including one currently in Australia, which the Committee has been told meets the criteria for a controlled scientific study. The question of whether to reimburse this procedure should be revisited when more rigorous studies are available for review
3. The Medical Advisory Committee recommends the director adopt a rule finding the IDET procedure noncompensable for the treatment of chronic low back pain.
4. "Chronic low back pain" is defined as back pain which persists following six months of conservative treatment.

DISCUSSION: The MAC members reviewed the available literature published on IDET and other documents and communications discussing its use and effectiveness. The Committee also listened to a presentation by SAIF Corporation staff recommending the IDET procedure not be compensable because it is experimental. We also listened to a presentation by Michael Karasek, M.D. a neurologist, who has done a number of IDET procedures in Oregon. Dr. Karasek stated that the evidence overwhelmingly supports that the procedure is effective when performed on a carefully screened group of patients who meet certain criteria. There were other presentations by Oratec, the manufacturer of the device used in the IDET procedure and Timothy Keenen, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon. Dr. Keenen stated he believes the IDET procedure is appropriate treatment for a subset of patients who do not respond to conservative treatment and who are not candidates for fusion or other standard interventions.

It may be shown in the future that the IDET procedure is an effective treatment for low back pain. Studies underway may provide more rigorous evidence about the effectiveness of the procedure, and the Committee would like to revisit this issue if such evidence becomes available.

The Committee will address the definitions of "unscientific," "unproven," "outmoded," and "experimental," used in ORS 656.245(3), in a future memorandum. We will also consider the question of whether these words are medically relevant or whether they would be better replaced by other terms.