

Fast Facts

News for Providers from HealthPartners Professional Services and Hospital Network Management



November Special Edition

NEW MEDICAL SPINE CENTER APPROACH BEGINS JANUARY 1, 2012

HealthPartners is announcing our new Medical Spine Center approach effective January 1, 2012

This new approach requires that patients receive an evaluation from a HealthPartners Designated Medical Spine Center (MSC) prior to the first office visit with a Spine Surgeon for specified lumbar conditions unless there is an emergent indication.

The primary goal is to ensure that *all prospective lumbar spine surgery candidates* have timely access to a comprehensive nonsurgical evaluation and in consultation with their doctor, their treatment plan options are presented so they can make decisions, which meet their care needs and are aligned with their values.

About the Medical Spine Centers approach

In alignment with the ICSI's **Low Back Pain guidelines**, Medical Spine Centers are clinics with medical spine specialists (Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, Occupational Medicine, Sports Medicine physicians or clinicians with advanced extensive training in spine care) whose focus is on the non-surgical, comprehensive management of spine conditions using a biopsychosocial active re-conditioning model.

Seeing a medical spine specialist prior to the first spine surgery office visit is similar to seeing a cardiologist prior to having heart surgery. The medical spine specialist helps to support prospective surgical patients and their physicians so they can understand the full range of options in choosing the treatment path that is right for them.

Emergent Exemptions.

Patients with sudden progressive neurologic deterioration from a lumbar spine condition are not required to have a Medical Spine Specialist evaluation prior to the first office visit with a spine surgeon. This can include any of the following:

- Cauda equina syndrome
- Any other red flag condition as outlined in the **Spine Surgery Consult Visit policy**
- Any other documented emergent need including care provided in the:
 - Emergency department or
 - Inpatient setting

Community guideline recommends considering a non-surgical spine specialist when first line treatment fails.

ICSI, 2011

Overview of the Process

All first line care & initial treatment for the patient's low back pain would still be provided by their regular clinician (Physical Therapy, Epidural Steroid Injections).

The new approach affects patients that will be having their first spine surgeon office visit.

STEP 1: Primary Clinician
Recommends and coordinates a medical spine center visit

STEP 2: Medical Spine Specialist
Completes comprehensive evaluation and recommends a treatment plan. A copy of this treatment plan will be sent to the primary clinician.

STEP 3: Spine Surgeon
If the patient continues on to see a Spine Surgeon for their lumbar back pain, the first office visit will require prior authorization. The spine surgeon's office will request a copy of the visit summary notes from the MSC to submit the PA form.

When you are considering scheduling a first spine surgery office visit for your patient with lumbar back pain, or your patient requests to see a surgeon, you will need to schedule a medical spine specialist visit for your patient first, unless there is an emergent condition.

During the medical spine visit, the specialist will confirm the diagnosis and provide treatment recommendations to the primary physician and the patient. Their evaluation will focus on comprehensive management of spine problems using a biopsychosocial active re-conditioning model, development of a care treatment plan that is evidence based and facilitate appropriate patient decision-making and offer non-surgical alternatives, if appropriate.

After the medical spine visit, the patient may decide whether to schedule the first spine surgery office visit. This decision is made by the patient and/or their primary clinician, regardless of the recommendation of the Medical Spine Center (MSC) specialist.

The orthopedic spine surgeon/neurosurgeon will need to submit a **Spine Surgery Consult Visit** prior authorization when scheduling the first spine surgery visit for lumbar back pain patients. The steps for prior authorization include:

1. Must obtain a copy of the evaluation from either the primary care office or the medical spine center to verify MSC evaluation.
2. Complete the **Spine Surgery Consult Visit Medical Review form** and
 - Verify that the patient has had a MSC evaluation

If surgery is indicated after the first spine surgery office visit, prior authorization by the spine surgeon is still required for all **Spine Fusion-Lumbar surgery**. The surgeon will be responsible to complete the Spine Fusion-Lumbar Medical Review form and provide medical spine evaluation documentation. Beginning April 1, 2012 HealthPartners will require prior authorization for all lumbar spine laminectomy surgeries.

Orthopedic Spine or Neurosurgeon

For complete details see the Prior Authorization for Spine Surgery Consult Visits administrative policy that explains process and responsibilities

Communication & Resources

During the summer, we conducted several educational Town Hall meetings with the medical spine specialists, spine surgery and primary care groups on the new approach. In addition, we will include communication for members in our targeted shared decision making letters outlining how their primary care physician may direct them to medical spine centers when surgery is being considered.

You will find information and resources below that will help support you and your practice as these changes go into effect.

Medical Spine Centers Information

Medical Spine Centers Approach Presentation

Designated Medical Spine Centers Network

Raising Awareness Fast Facts Article – September 2011

Administrative Policy - Surgical Consultation Visit

Spine Surgery Consult Prior Authorization Administrative Policy

Medical Policy –

Spine Surgery Consult Visit

Spine Surgery Consult Visit Policy

Spine Surgery Consult Visit Medical Review form

Spine Surgery Procedures

Spine Fusion - Lumbar Policy

Spine Fusion - Lumbar Medical Review form

Spine Lumbar Laminectomy Policy (Available 4/1)

- » For information on **Medical Spine Center application process**, contact Mary Gainey at 952-883-5752.
- » For questions regarding **Medical policy** call 952-883-5724
- » For questions regarding the **Administrative Policy** please contact your contract manager

Frequently Asked Questions

How Does a Clinic Become a Designated Medical Spine Center?

The centers in the Designated Network have demonstrated an integrated approach to non-surgical spine care management and a commitment to outcome measurement. Centers are selected using a comprehensive *Request for Information* process to evaluate their ability to meet the following criteria:

- A biopsychosocial active reconditioning model
- Evidence-based practices as demonstrated by use of ICSI guidelines and written, evidence-driven protocols
- Access standards
- A multi-disciplinary care team:
 - Physical Therapists with advanced certification in spine care
 - Care coordination for an integrated approach to care with referring physicians and other practitioners
 - Psychologist available with training and experience with chronic pain patients
 - Willingness to develop a formal shared decision making process
 - Willingness to report outcomes to HealthPartners

Can a patient see any Designated Medical Spine Center?

Yes, an evaluation by any Designated Medical Spine Center satisfies the requirements of the policy.

What if my patient sees a non-designated Medical Spine Center, are they still required to go to a Designated Medical Spine Center?

Yes. Medical Spine Centers in the designated network have demonstrated an integrated approach to non-surgical spine care management and a commitment to supporting the care that primary care physicians provide. Designated Medical Spine Centers are committed to meeting the access standards and sharing the recommended treatment plan with both primary care physicians and spine surgeons upon request.

Can a patient go directly to a Medical Spine Center without a recommendation from their physician?

In most situations, a primary care provider will inform the patient of their need to see a Medical Spine Center. However, a HealthPartners member may call to schedule an appointment with a Medical Spine Center just as they do today.

Where can I find a list of Designated Medical Spine Centers?

A list of the current Designated Medical Spine Centers can be found on the HealthPartners Provider Portal on the Back Pain page.

Who does this approach apply to?

This approach applies to Commercial and Medicaid patients in Minnesota, Western Wisconsin, and Eastern North and South Dakota.

What if my Patient still wants to see a Surgeon after an evaluation at the Medical Spine Center?

The intent of the program is to have members understand all the treatment options available to them for their lumbar back pain. They can choose to see a surgeon for up to six months following their evaluation visit with a Designated Medical Spine Center. If six months have passed since their Medical Spine Center visit, they will be required to have another evaluation at an MSC prior to visiting the surgeon.

What is the Process for the Spine Surgeon prior to the first lumbar spine surgery office visit?

The spine surgeon is required to submit a completed **Spine Surgery Consult Visit Medical Review** form prior to any consult visit for low back pain and other spine related complaints as outlined in the **Spine Surgery Consult Visit Policy**.

Does this process apply to the first spine surgery office visit for cervical or thoracic conditions?

No. The process applies to the first lumbar spine surgery office visit only and does not apply if you are seeing a patient for cervical or thoracic conditions.

What does the Spine Surgeon do if the Patient has not seen a Medical Spine Specialist prior to the requested first lumbar spine surgery office visit?

The Spine Surgeon would direct the patient to our Member Services area and ask for a Nurse Navigator. Nurse Navigators will give the patient information about the requirements and the **Designated Medical Spine Centers** available to them in the network.

» Please use the number found on the back of your patient's ID card to contact Member Services

What happens if the Spine Surgeon doesn't get a prior authorization for the first spine surgery office visit?

The office visit claim will be denied as provider liability to the spine surgeon's office if it is not an emergent condition. Please see the policy for complete details.

How are these changes being communicated to Patients?

Communication to patients may occur in several ways:

- In most situations, the primary care physician will discuss an evaluation with a medical spine specialist prior to considering a surgical consult visit.
- In some situations, a patient may call a surgeon to schedule an appointment without being aware of the requirement to see a Medical Spine Specialist for an evaluation. If this occurs, the surgeon's office will direct the patient to HealthPartners Member Services where they will receive information about the MSC from our Nurse Navigators.
- Members undergoing treatment for low back pain will receive a letter outlining the health plan resources available to them. This communication will also introduce the Medical Spine Center approach.