



**HIPPOTHERAPY  
(EQUINE THERAPY)  
HS-168**



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*Harmony Behavioral Health of Florida, Inc.*

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**Hippotherapy  
(Equine Therapy)**

**Policy Number: HS-168**

**Original Effective Date: 5/6/2010**

**Revised Date(s): 7/18/2011; 5/3/2012**

**DISCLAIMER**

The Clinical Coverage Guideline is intended to supplement certain standard WellCare benefit plans. The terms of a member's particular Benefit Plan, Evidence of Coverage, Certificate of Coverage, etc., may differ significantly from this Coverage Position. For example, a member's benefit plan may contain specific exclusions related to the topic addressed in this Clinical Coverage Guideline. When a conflict exists between the two documents, the Member's Benefit Plan always supersedes the information contained in the Clinical Coverage Guideline. Additionally, Clinical Coverage Guidelines relate exclusively to the administration of health benefit plans and are NOT recommendations for treatment, nor should they be used as treatment guidelines. The application of the Clinical Coverage Guideline is subject to the benefit determinations set forth by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) National and Local Coverage Determinations and state-specific Medicaid mandates, if any.

**APPLICATION STATEMENT**

The application of the Clinical Coverage Guideline is subject to the benefit determinations set forth by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) National and Local Coverage Determinations and state-specific Medicaid mandates, if any.

## **BACKGROUND**

Hippotherapy is a physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology treatment strategy that uses the multidimensional movement of the horse to improve neuromuscular function and sensory processing in children and adults with movement dysfunction. The term hippotherapy is literally defined as “treatment with the help of the horse” from the Greek word *hippos*, meaning horse. It is part of an integrated treatment strategy performed by healthcare professionals, including specially trained physical and occupational therapists. Hippotherapy is considered a distinct subspecialty of the broad, umbrella term “therapeutic riding.” Therapeutic riding refers to the use of the horse and equine-oriented activities to achieve a variety of therapeutic goals, including physical, emotional, social, cognitive, behavioral, and educational goals. Therapeutic riding generally encompasses both leisure and therapeutic activities and may be conducted by nontherapist riding instructors and assistants. In contrast, hippotherapy is specialized and is always directed by a licensed healthcare professional. Functional riding and horsemanship skills are not taught during hippotherapy. Rather, the emphasis is on the achievement of specific therapeutic goals facilitated by the movement of the horse. Despite the unusual nature of hippotherapy, its rationale is based on current theories of motor development and control and established neurophysiologic treatment principles.

Hippotherapy has been used for a wide variety of conditions and medical disorders since the 1950s. Conditions that may be improved through hippotherapy include abnormal muscle tone; impaired balance responses; impaired coordination; impaired communication; impaired sensorimotor function; postural asymmetry; poor postural control; decreased mobility; and limbic system issues related to arousal, motivation, and attention. Hippotherapy has been used in patients with amputations, autism, back pain, cerebral palsy, developmental disorders, Down syndrome, hemiplegia, genetic syndromes, learning disabilities, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, posttraumatic stress syndrome, sensory integration disorders, speech-language disorders, spinal cord injury, spina bifida, stroke, and traumatic brain injury. Hippotherapy has been used in patients varying in age from toddler to adult (Hayes, 2009).

## **POSITION STATEMENT**

Hippotherapy, also known as equine therapy, **is considered experimental and investigational and NOT a covered benefit in all cases.**

## **CODING**

### **Non Covered CPT® Codes**

- 97139** Unlisted Therapeutic procedure
- 97799** Unlisted Physical medicine / rehabilitation service or procedure

**ICD-9-CM Procedure Codes** - No applicable codes.

### **Non-Covered HCPCS Level II Code**

- S8940** Equestrian / hippotherapy, per session
- \*S- Codes are NON COVERED FOR MEDICARE – Refer to HCPCS Level II Temporary National Codes

**Non-Covered CD-9-CM Diagnosis Codes** - All diagnosis codes

\*Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) 2012 American Medical Association: Chicago, IL.®©

## REFERENCES

### Peer Reviewed

1. Benda, W., McGibbon, N.H., & Grant, K.L. (2003). Improvements in muscle symmetry in children with cerebral palsy after equine-assisted therapy (hippotherapy). *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 9(6), 817-825.
2. Casady, R.L., & Nichols-Larsen, D.S. (2004). The effect of hippotherapy on ten children with cerebral palsy. *Pediatric Physical Therapy*, 16(3), 165-172.
3. Cheng, R., Liao, H., Leung, H.W.C., & et al. (2004). The effectiveness of therapeutic horseback riding in children with spastic CP. *Adapted Physical Therapy Activity Quarterly*, 21, 103-121.
4. Davis, E., Davies, B., Wolfe, R., & et al. (2009). A randomized controlled trial of the impact of therapeutic horse riding on the quality of life, health, and function of children with cerebral palsy. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 51(2), 111-119.
5. Hayes Directory. (2009, August 7). Hippotherapy for neuromusculoskeletal dysfunction. Retrieved from <http://www.hayesinc.com>
6. Silkwood-Sherer, D., & Warmbier, H. (2007). Effects of hippotherapy on postural stability, in persons with multiple sclerosis: a pilot study. *Journal of Neurological Physical Therapy*, 31(2), 77-84.
7. Snider, L., Korner-Bitensky, N., Kammann, C., & et al. (2007). Horseback riding as therapy for children with cerebral palsy: is there evidence of its effectiveness? *Physical and Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*, 27(2), 5-23.

### Government Agencies, Professional and Medical Organizations

1. American Hippotherapy Association. (2010). Hippotherapy as a treatment strategy. Retrieved from <http://www.americanhippotherapyassociation.org/hippotherapy/hippotherapy-as-a-treatment-strategy/> Updated link, date.

## HISTORY AND REVISIONS

Date	Action
5/3/2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approved by MPC. No changes.</li></ul>
12/1/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New template design approved by MPC.</li></ul>
7/18/2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approved by MPC.</li></ul>