

**Subject:** Inpatient Interfacility Transfers  
**Guideline #:** CG-ANC-07

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## Description

This document addresses the clinical features of a hospitalized individual who may require services unavailable at an initial acute care facility (originating facility) necessitating a transfer to a second acute care facility (receiving facility) and receiving subsequent care at the receiving facility.

This document does not address:

- the transport between emergency rooms of individuals requiring critical care; or
- the transfer of individuals to other types of facilities, such as sub-acute, long-term or rehabilitative facilities; or
- the medical necessity of a specific diagnostic or therapeutic procedure, a specific mode of interfacility transportation, or the inpatient level of care.

**Note:** Please see the following related documents for additional information:

- CG-ANC-04 Ambulance Services: Air and Water
- CG-ANC-05 Ambulance Services: Ground; Emergent
- CG-ANC-06 Ambulance Services: Ground; Non-Emergent
- CG-MED-26 Neonatal Levels of Care

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### Clinical Indications

#### Medically Necessary:

Interfacility transfers are considered **medically necessary** when **one or more** of the following criteria are met:

- The individual requires a *medically necessary* diagnostic or therapeutic service (for example, organ transplantation) which is not available at the originating facility; **or**
- The individual requires a level of care (for example, neonatal care unit or level 1 trauma center) which is not available at the originating facility; **or**
- The individual requires the services of a specialist to evaluate, diagnose or treat his or her condition when that specialist is not available in a timely manner at the originating facility (Note: Timeliness of care is a case/individual specific attribute. It may be appropriate for a medically stable individual to await availability of a specialist for several days while a medically unstable individual may require care more quickly); **or**
- The individual has received care at a specific prior institution for a condition not normally managed at the originating facility (for example, organ transplant recipient) and return to that prior institution is needed to diagnose, manage, or treat a complication or other acute issue.

Interfacility maternal transfer to allow birth mother to remain with neonate is considered **medically necessary** when neonate transfer meets the medically necessary criteria listed above and the birth mother requires continued hospitalization due to birth complications or other medically necessary conditions.

#### Not Medically Necessary:

Interfacility transfers between an originating facility and a receiving facility are considered **not medically necessary** when:

- The criteria above have not been met; **or**
- The ~~services are transfer~~ is primarily for the convenience of the individual, the individual's family, the physician or the originating facility.

Admission and subsequent care at the receiving facility is **not medically necessary** when:

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- The criteria above have not been met; interfacility transfer does not meet medical necessity criteria listed above or
- The transfer is primarily for the convenience of the individual, the individual's family, the physician or the originating facility.

### Coding

*Coding edits for medical necessity review are not implemented for this guideline. Where a more specific policy or guideline exists, that document will take precedence and may include specific coding edits and/or instructions. Inclusion or exclusion of a procedure, diagnosis or device code(s) does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement policy. Please refer to the member's contract benefits in effect at the time of service to determine coverage or non-coverage of these services as it applies to an individual member.*

### Discussion/General Information

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) defines an acute care transfer as the discharge of an inpatient individual from one hospital and re-admittance of that individual to another hospital, when the readmission is related to the initial discharge. Each year, approximately 1.6 million individuals are involved in an interfacility transfer (Usher, 2018).

The interfacility transfer of individuals in the acute care setting comes with inherent risks and time delays (Kulshrestha, 2016; Singh, 2009). For example, Singh (2009) noted the following:

the available data suggest land ambulance accidents are a cause of healthcare worker and patient mortality and occur with sufficient frequency that emergency medical personnel have a similar occupational risk of death as firefighters and police.

Singh (2009) notes “Critically ill patients may be at risk of clinical deterioration due to the stresses of transport, due to progression of their underlying disease or due to adverse events related to clinical care occurring before or during transport.” When the individual requires services which are not available at the originating facility, the benefits of

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an interfacility transfer outweigh the inherent risks of such a transfer. However, the literature does not support that better clinical individual outcomes are achieved for those who are transferred for convenience.

de Nieuport and associates (2017) studied the effects of ambulance transfer of 91 premature infants from an intensive setting to a lower care setting. Physiological and respiratory support data from the day prior to transport and 7 days following transport were analyzed. An increased number of bradycardias and need for respiratory support was reported. In addition, longer transfer times were associated with lower body temperatures, resulting in higher metabolic demands and possible earlier exhaustion of the infant. The authors noted that it is unknown whether transfers are associated with longer hospitalizations.

Kulshrestha and colleague (2016) noted that when an individual is transported, a number of adverse physiological alterations can take place. These alterations can include changes in levels of noise, vibration, temperature, humidity, acceleration and altitude. The authors noted that the goal of any transfer should be to maintain the optimal health of the individual, which is accomplished by transferring to the nearest facility which provides the highest specialized care needed.

Approximately 65,000 infants in the United States were transferred from the birth hospital to a tertiary care center in 2014 (Schwartz, 2018). The 2017 Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) guidelines for family centered care in the neonatal, pediatric and adult ICU focus on the importance of family presence and support in the critical care setting. Schwartz (2018) notes:

Although admission to a tertiary NICU may enhance the survival and long-term prospects of the newborn, the separation of mother and neonate may have psychological consequences impacting long-term well-being.

Open flexible access as well as allowing the opportunity to assist in the care of a neonate is associated with improved parental confidence and psychological health during and following an ICU stay (Davidson, 2017).

The transfer of an inpatient individual to a receiving acute facility with additional appropriate services is appropriate when the individual requires care not available at this original facility. However, the evidence does not

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support that transfer back to the original facility is more clinically appropriate than remaining at the receiving facility, when the receiving facility provides all services and care which an individual requires.

Circumstances in which an individual's care needs cannot be met in their current facility will meet the medical necessity criteria in this guideline. Admission and subsequent care It is therefore not medically necessary to be readmitted and subsequently cared for in the receiving facility is not medically necessary when the needed care is available is available in the originating facility.

### Definitions

Originating facility: The facility at which an individual has been admitted for care and from which transfer is proposed.

Receiving facility:- The facility to which transfer is proposed.

### References

#### **Peer Reviewed Publications:**

1. de Nieuport SMPD, van Beek R, Kornelisse RF, Tramper-Stranders G. Interhospital transfer of premature neonates from intensive to lower care settings: impact on the clinical condition. *Arch Dis Child Fetal Neonatal Ed.* 2017; 102(6):F560-F561.
2. Kulshrestha A, Singh J. Inter-hospital and intra-hospital patient transfer: Recent concepts. *Indian J Anaesth.* 2016; 60(7):451-457.
3. Ray JG, Urquia ML, Berger H, et al. Maternal and neonatal separation and mortality associated with concurrent admissions to intensive care units. *CMAJ.* 2012; 184(18):E956-E962.
4. Rosenthal JL, Romano PS, Kokroko J, et al. Receiving providers' perceptions on information transmission during interfacility transfers to general pediatric floors. *Hosp Pediatr.* 2017; 7(6):335-343.

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- Singh JM, MacDonald RD. Pro/con debate: do the benefits of regionalized critical care delivery outweigh the risks of interfacility patient transport? *Crit Care.* 2009; 13(4):219.
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### Government Agency, Medical Society, and Other Authoritative Publications:

- American College of Emergency Physicians. Appropriate interhospital patient transfer. *Ann Emerg Med.* 2009; 54(1):141.
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine (SMFM). *Obstetric Care Consensus. Levels of Maternal Care.* Reaffirmed 2016. Available at: <https://www.acog.org/-/media/Obstetric-Care-Consensus-Series/oc002.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20190220T1053319774>. Accessed on February July 1820, 2019.
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Administration. *Code of Federal Regulations. Chapter IV, Part 412.4. Prospective payment systems for inpatient hospital services. Discharges and transfers.* Available at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title42-vol2/pdf/CFR-2011-title42-vol2-sec412-4.pdf>. Accessed on March July 18, 2019.
- Davidson JE, Aslakson RA, Long AC, et al. Guidelines for Family-Centered Care in the Neonatal, Pediatric, and Adult ICU. *Crit Care Med.* 2017; 45(1):103-128.

### Index

Interfacility Transfer

Originating Facility

Receiving Acute Care Facility

Transferring Acute Care Facility

**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.**

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## History

Status	Date	Action
Revised	08/22/2019	<u>Medical Policy &amp; Technology Assessment Committee (MPTAC) review. Added not medically necessary statements regarding admission and subsequent care at the receiving facility. Added Definitions section. Updated Description, Discussion and References sections.</u>
Revised	03/21/2019	<u>Medical Policy &amp; Technology Assessment Committee (MPTAC) review. Added medically necessary statement regarding mother/neonate transfer. Updated Discussion and References sections.</u>
New	01/24/2019	MPTAC review. Initial document development.

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