



December 9, 2021

Julie B. Kessel, MD
National Medical Director for Coverage Policy
Clinical Performance & Quality Organization
Cigna

re: Coverage of FeNO Testing for the Management of Asthma

Dear Dr. Kessel:

I am writing on behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), the leading patient organization for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world, to urge Cigna to provide full insurance coverage for fractional exhaled nitric oxide (FeNO) testing. I understand that Cigna is preparing to review its coverage policy, “Exhaled Nitric Oxide in the Management of Respiratory Disorders (coverage policy #0439).” AAFA believes that FeNO testing is an important tool for accurately diagnosing and monitoring an individual’s asthma.

FeNO testing is a noninvasive, simple, safe and fast method of assessing Type 2 airway inflammation. If someone has already been diagnosed with asthma, tracking FeNO levels will help determine if a patient’s current management plan is working properly and will help assess if medicines may need to be adjusted. If someone has not been diagnosed with asthma, a FeNO test can help support an asthma diagnosis and can rule out other conditions that have symptoms similar to asthma.¹

Cigna’s current coverage policy states, “The measurement of exhaled nitric oxide for the management of asthma and/or other respiratory disorders is considered experimental, investigational or unproven due to insufficient evidence of beneficial health outcomes.”² We disagree with this assessment and urge Cigna to cover this important test.

Major published asthma guidelines support FeNO testing for many purposes in the management of asthma, including the most recently published updates from the Expert Panel Working Group of the NHLBI.³ AAFA is particularly concerned about the impact on health care disparities if FeNO is not fully covered by insurance carriers. In the NHLBI Panel’s recent publication, it noted that “if FeNO testing is not widely available and its use is restricted by insurance coverage

¹ AAFA, “FeNO Tests to Monitor FeNO Levels” (Medical Review 2017). Available at www.aafa.org/asthma/asthma-diagnosis/lung-function-tests/feno-tests-to-monitor-feno-levels.aspx

² Cigna National Coverage Policy, “Exhaled Nitric Oxide in the Management of Respiratory Disorders” (effective date December 15, 2020). Available at https://static.cigna.com/assets/chcp/pdf/coveragePolicies/medical/mm_0439_coveragepositioncriteria_exhaled_nitric_oxide_monitoring.pdf

³ National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/asthma-management-guidelines-2020-updates/faqs>



policies, some individuals with asthma might not have the benefit of exacerbation reduction using FENO-based monitoring and management algorithms. As a result, disparities in asthma outcomes would widen.”⁴

In addition, the American Thoracic Society’s recent update to its guideline, “Use of Fractional Exhaled Nitric Oxide to Guide the Treatment of Asthma An Official American Thoracic Society Clinical Practice Guideline,” makes a conditional recommendation for FENO-based care: “In patients with asthma in whom treatment is being considered, we suggest that FENO is beneficial and should be used in addition to usual care.”⁵

AAFA urges Cigna to review the most recent guidelines on this topic and to revise its coverage policy to be consistent with evidence-based recommendations. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Mendez
President and CEO
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

⁴ NHLBI, “2020 Focused Updates to the Asthma Management Guidelines: A Report from the National Asthma Education and Prevention Program Coordinating Committee Expert Panel Working Group” J. Allergy and Clinical Immunology (Dec 2020). Available at [www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749\(20\)31404-4/fulltext#secsectitle0145](http://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749(20)31404-4/fulltext#secsectitle0145)

⁵ Khatri et al., “Use of Fractional Exhaled Nitric Oxide to Guide the Treatment of Asthma: An Official American Thoracic Society Clinical Practice Guideline.” American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine Volume 204 Number 10, November 15 2021. www.atsjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1164/rccm.202109-2093ST