



Inspector Detector



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Sports Injury Treatment with PRP Therapy

What do Tiger Woods, Takashi Saito (LA Dodgers Pitcher) and Hines Ward (Pittsburg Steelers) have in common? (Hint, it's not what you think!). Yes, all three have undergone the latest sports injury treatment with Platelet-Rich Plasma Injection therapy (PRP).

PRP therapy was originally used to aid bone healing after spinal surgery and soft tissue injuries during knee, hip and elbow arthroscopic surgery. Recently, PRP treatment has exploded for sports-related injuries such as chronic tendonitis of the elbow, knee, heel and shoulder. Instead of season ending surgery for Takashi Saito, it is believed that PRP injections to his elbow allowed him to return to the mound for the baseball playoffs.

Tendon injuries involve microscopic tearing of the tendon and formation of scar tissue. As a result, tendon injuries are slow to heal due to a poor blood supply. The PRP method involves collecting the patient's blood, separating out the platelet rich portion (which contains growth factors) and injecting it back into the injury site. In theory, the platelets stimulate the repair of injured tissue by increasing blood flow in the joint tissues. In some cases, this technique appears to help regenerate ligament and tendon fibers. PRP is administered as part of an orthopedic office visit or during surgery. Benefits include using the patient's own blood (autologous) thereby reducing the chance for allergic reactions. Injections performed in lieu of surgery carry far less chance for infection than an incision and leave no scar.

Current studies are mixed and provide little scientific evidence for the effectiveness of PRP injections.

The available evidence is largely based on non-randomized studies. While doctors agree the procedure is worth pursuing, it appears to be ineffective in 20-40% of cases depending on the injury. Most insurance companies consider PRP experimental and investigational for the treatment of tendonopathies because its effectiveness has not been established (Aetna, Blue Cross/Blue Shield).

Healthcare claims vary widely when coding for PRP injections. Our reviews have found PRP injections are given during arthroscopic knee, shoulder and hip procedures. Some of the incorrect CPT codes submitted include 29999 (unlisted procedures), 20926 (tissue grafts), 20551 (tendon injections) and 86999 (unlisted transfusion medicine procedure).

CPT 0232T was published by the AMA for PRP injections effective July, 2010. Temporary codes allow data collection for emerging technology, services and procedures. Per AMA "the inclusion of a service or procedure in this section neither implies nor endorses clinical efficacy, safety or the applicability to clinical practice." For now, keep an eye open for incorrect coding of this emerging and controversial procedure.

In the Wide World of Sports Injuries (includes the weekend warriors like us), PRP coding can be confusing and inconsistent. Rest assured, TC³ has identified and investigated PRP claims resulting in substantial savings for our clients.

The Inspector Detector is a complimentary benefit to TC³ payer clients. It is our hope that the newsletter will serve as one more vehicle in our ongoing Fraud Awareness Training & Education campaign for our clients. Please refer potential fraud cases to our Fraud hotline at 866-949-3711.

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