L-Carnitine Use in U.S. Dialysis Patients before 2003 National Coverage Decision.

Wendy L. St. Peter, Tricia L. Roberts, David R. Gilbertson, Allan J. Collins. USRDS, MMRF, Minneapolis, MN; Medicine, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

Prior to 2003, no consistent Medicare (CMS) policy for carnitine reimbursement existed. We described characteristics of dialysis patients using carnitine before the new CMS policy. We studied a national cohort of adult, Medicare dialysis patients (N=86,904) prevalent on 1/1/2000, erythropoietin (EPO) treated, and with Medicare as a primary payer. The first intravenous (IV) carnitine dose from 1/1/2000 to 7/31/2001 defined the start of a 6-mo. carnitine treatment period. Patients with carnitine in 5 or 6 out of 6 mos., and with at least 10 g per mo. were classified as consistently dosed; otherwise, inconsistently dosed. Patients without carnitine were also included as a comparison group (start of treatment period was randomly assigned). Patients were characterized during a 6-mo. entry period preceding the treatment period. A logistic regression model provided odds ratios of starting carnitine treatment, adjusting for age, gender, race, ethnicity, primary diagnosis, duration of dialysis, and these entry-period values: weekly EPO dose, infectious and non-infectious hospital days, vascular access procedures, blood transfusions, urea reduction ratio, IV iron use, iron tests, anemia, and comorbidities. 82,149 patients did not receive carnitine; 2,973 and 1,782 received consistent and inconsistent carnitine therapy, respectively. Groups with significantly higher (P<0.05) odds of receiving carnitine were as follows: age >75 yrs (vs. < 45), white race (vs. black), Hispanic ethnicity (vs. non-Hispanic), dialysis duration <2 yrs or >5 yrs (vs. 2-<5), 1-4 vascular access procedures (vs. 0), ≥1 blood transfusion (vs. 0), Hb <11 g/dL (vs. ≥11), with (vs. without) iron tests, weekly EPO dose ≥19,800 U (vs. 12,150-<19,800), without (vs. with) peripheral vascular or liver disease, with (vs. without) congestive heart failure (CHF)/cardiomyopathy or cancer. Prior to the new CMS policy, only 3.4% of dialysis patients received consistent carnitine therapy. Patients who were white, had CHF/cardiomyopathy, lower Hb levels or higher weekly EPO doses were more likely to receive carnitine.