

Clinical Policy: Imetelstat (Rytelo)

Reference Number: LA.PHAR.690

Effective Date: 12.18.24

Last Review Date: 01.12.26

Line of Business: Medicaid

[Coding Implications](#)
[Revision Log](#)

See [Important Reminder](#) at the end of this policy for important regulatory and legal information.

****Please note: This policy is for medical benefit****

Description

Imetelstat (Rytelo™) is an oligonucleotide telomerase inhibitor.

FDA Approved Indication(s)

Rytelo is indicated for the treatment of adult patients with low- to intermediate-1 risk myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS) with transfusion-dependent anemia requiring 4 or more red blood cell (RBC) units over 8 weeks who have not responded to or have lost response to or are ineligible for erythropoiesis-stimulating agents (ESA).

Policy/Criteria

Provider must submit documentation (such as office chart notes, lab results or other clinical information) supporting that member has met all approval criteria.

It is the policy of Louisiana Healthcare Connections that Rytelo is **medically necessary** when the following criteria are met:

I. Initial Approval Criteria

A. Myelodysplastic Syndromes (must meet all):

1. Diagnosis of MDS with transfusion-dependent anemia;
2. Prescribed by or in consultation with a hematologist or oncologist;
3. Age \geq 18 years;
4. Member has low risk or intermediate-1 risk MDS disease as classified by IPSS (*see Appendix D*);
5. Documentation of at least 4 RBC units transfused over 8 weeks;
6. Member does not have del(5q) cytogenetic abnormality;
7. Member meets one of the following (a or b):
 - a. Inadequate response to or ineligible for ESA therapy (e.g., epoetin alfa, darbepoetin, *see Appendix B*);
 - b. One of the following (i or ii):
 - i. Failure of Retacrit™, unless contraindicated or clinically significant adverse effects are experienced;
**Prior authorization may be required for Retacrit*
 - ii. If Retacrit is unavailable due to shortage, member must use Epogen®, unless contraindicated or clinically significant adverse effects are experienced;
**Prior authorization may be required for Epogen*

8. Rytelo is not prescribed concurrently with Reblozyl®;
9. Request meets one of the following (a or b):*
 - a. Dose does not exceed 7.1 mg/kg every 4 weeks;
 - b. Dose is supported by practice guidelines or peer-reviewed literature for the relevant off-label use (*prescriber must submit supporting evidence*).

*Prescribed regimen must be FDA-approved or recommended by NCCN

Approval duration: 6 months

B. Other diagnoses/indications (must meet all):

1. If this drug has recently (within the last 6 months) undergone a label change (e.g., newly approved indication, age expansion, new dosing regimen) that is not yet reflected in this policy, refer to LA.PMN.255
2. If the requested use (e.g., diagnosis, age, dosing regimen) is NOT specifically listed under section III (Diagnoses/Indications for which coverage is NOT authorized) AND criterion 1 above does not apply, refer to the off-label use policy LA.PMN.53.

II. Continued Therapy

A. Myelodysplastic Syndromes (must meet all):

1. Currently receiving medication via Louisiana Healthcare Connections benefit or member has previously met initial approval criteria;
2. Member is responding positively to therapy as evidence by decrease of RBC transfusions requirement;
3. Rytelo is not prescribed concurrently with Reblozyl;
4. If request is for a dose increase, request meets one of the following (a or b):*
 - a. Dose does not exceed 7.1 mg/kg every 4 weeks;
 - b. Dose is supported by practice guidelines or peer-reviewed literature for the relevant off-label use (*prescriber must submit supporting evidence*).

*Prescribed regimen must be FDA-approved or recommended by NCCN

Approval duration: 6 months

B. Other diagnoses/indications (must meet 1 or 2):

1. If this drug has recently (within the last 6 months) undergone a label change (e.g., newly approved indication, age expansion, new dosing regimen) that is not yet reflected in this policy, refer to LA.PMN.255
2. If the requested use (e.g., diagnosis, age, dosing regimen) is NOT specifically listed under section III (Diagnoses/Indications for which coverage is NOT authorized) AND criterion 1 above does not apply, refer to the off-label use policy LA.PMN.53.

III. Diagnoses/Indications for which coverage is NOT authorized:

- A.** Non-FDA approved indications, which are not addressed in this policy, unless there is sufficient documentation of efficacy and safety according to the off label use policy – LA.PMN.53.

IV. Appendices/General Information

Appendix A: Abbreviation/Acronym Key

ESA: erythropoiesis-stimulating agent

FDA: Food and Drug Administration

IPSS: International Prognostic Scoring System

MDS: myelodysplastic syndrome
RBC: red blood cell

Appendix B: Therapeutic Alternatives

This table provides a listing of preferred alternative therapy recommended in the approval criteria. The drugs listed here may not be a formulary agent and may require prior authorization.

Drug Name	Dosing Regimen	Dose Limit/ Maximum Dose
Procrit [®] , Epogen [®] , Retacrit [®] (epoetin alfa)*	40,000 to 60,000 units SC 1 to 2 times per week every week	Target hemoglobin up to 12 g/dL
Aranesp [®] (darbepoetin alfa)*	150 to 300 mcg SC every other week	Target hemoglobin up to 12 g/dL

Therapeutic alternatives are listed as Brand name[®] (generic) when the drug is available by brand name only and generic (Brand name[®]) when the drug is available by both brand and generic.

**Off-label*

Appendix C: Contraindications/Boxed Warnings

None reported

Appendix D: MDS Risk Classification

- International Prognostic Scoring System (IPSS) classification:

Risk Category	Risk Score
Low	0
Intermediate-1	0.5 – 1
Intermediate-2	1.5 – 2
High	2.5 – 3.5

V. Dosage and Administration

Indication	Dosing Regimen	Maximum Dose
MDS	7.1 mg/kg intravenous infusion over 2 hours every 4 weeks	7.1 mg/kg/4 weeks

VI. Product Availability

Single-dose vials: 47 mg, 188 mg

VII. References

- Rytelo Prescribing Information. Foster City, CA: Geron Corporation.; June 2024. Available at: https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/drugsatfda_docs/label/2024/217779s000lbl.pdf. Accessed April 17, 2025.
- Bohlius J, Bohlke K, Castelli R, et al. American Society of Hematology/American Society of Clinical Oncology clinical practice guideline update: Management of Cancer-Associated Anemia with Erythropoiesis-Stimulating Agents. 2019 May 20; J Clin Oncol 37:1336-1351. Available at: <https://ascopubs.org/doi/pdf/10.1200/JCO.18.02142>.
- Clinical Pharmacology [database online]. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2025. Available at: <https://www.clinicalkey.com/pharmacology/>. Accessed June 2, 2025.

4. National Comprehensive Cancer Network. Myelodysplastic Syndromes Version 2.2025. Available at: https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/mds.pdf. Accessed June 2, 2025.
5. Platzbecker U, Santini V, Fenaux P, et al. Imetelstat in patients with lower-risk myelodysplastic syndromes who have relapsed or are refractory to erythropoiesis-stimulating agents (IMerge): a multinational, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, phase 3 trial. *Lancet*. 2024 Jan 20;403(10423):249-260. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(23)01724-5. Epub 2023 Dec 1. Erratum in: *Lancet*. 2024 Jan 20;403(10423):248. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(24)00057-6. PMID: 38048786.

Coding Implications

Codes referenced in this clinical policy are for informational purposes only. Inclusion or exclusion of any codes does not guarantee coverage. Providers should reference the most up-to-date sources of professional coding guidance prior to the submission of claims for reimbursement of covered services.

HCPCS Codes	Description
J0870	Injection, imetelstat, 1 mg

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Date	LDH Approval Date
Converted to local policy.	08.23.24	11.14.24
Added HCPCS code [J0870] and removed codes [C9399, J9999].	03.11.25	05.19.25
Annual review: no significant changes; references reviewed and updated.	01.12.26	

Important Reminder

This clinical policy has been developed by appropriately experienced and licensed health care professionals based on a review and consideration of currently available generally accepted standards of medical practice; peer-reviewed medical literature; government agency/program approval status; evidence-based guidelines and positions of leading national health professional organizations; views of physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas affected by this clinical policy; and other available clinical information. LHCC makes no representations and accepts no liability with respect to the content of any external information used or relied upon in developing this clinical policy. This clinical policy is consistent with standards of medical practice current at the time that this clinical policy was approved.

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