Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) Pathway Flow Chart

Initial Evaluation

Symptoms consistent with CTS
- Pain/numbness in hand/wrist/forearm
- Tingling in thumb, index & middle finger
- Nocturnal awakening
- Shaking hand for relief (Flick Sign)

Co-morbidities/yellow flag risk factors
- See pages 5 & 7 of Clinical Pathway

Yes
- Refer or Treat (see Appendix A)

No
- Treat primary symptoms

Yes
- Determine Severity

Mild/Moderate
- Muscle atrophy; mild weakness of thenar muscles
- Positive tests: Phalen’s/Tinel’s; 2-point discrimination

Severe
- Muscle atrophy; severe weakness of thenar muscles
- 2-point discrimination >6mm

No
- Rule Out
  - (a) cervical radiculopathy
  - (b) Tendonitis
  - (c) Osteoarthritis
  - (d) Thoracic outlet syndrome, brachial plexus disorders

Yes
- Refer to appropriate specialist

No
- Pursue further evaluation

Treatment

Mild/Moderate
- Conservative Treatment (see pgs 7 & 8)

Severe
- Go directly to Electrodiagnostic Testing (see page 9)
**Conservative Treatment**

1. **Initial Visit Day 1-14**
   - Alteration in activity
   - Night/possible day splint
   - Proper analgesic
   - Modified work duty when necessary (see page 5 “Evaluation for Work-Relatedness”)
   - Consider ergonomic evaluation of job according to OSHA standards

2. **Second Visit day 14 - About Two Weeks After First Visit**
   - Document progress
   - Recommend wrist neutral night splint
   - Consider ergonomic evaluation according to OSHA standards

3. **Third Visit Day 28 - About 1 Month After First Visit**
   - Document progress
   - Corticosteroid injection trial (high likelihood of relief, but may have recurrence of symptoms within several months -- initial relief of symptoms good indicator of success of surgery, even possible to skip Electrodiagnostic Testing). Should be performed by musculoskeletally trained physician.
   - Vitamin B6 therapy has been successful if deficient, but is controversial.

4. **Fourth Visit - Day 42 -- About Six Weeks After First Visit**
   - Refer for Electrodiagnostic Testing

**Electrodiagnostic Testing**

All severe cases, plus mild/moderate cases without improvement after Initial Conservative Treatment above.
- Refer to specialists certified in electrodiagnostic medicine, for electromyography (EMG)/Nerve Conduction Studies
- Positive test: refer for evaluation for Carpal Tunnel Release

**Carpal Tunnel Release**

See Complete CTS Pathway for post-surgical treatment and follow-up and return to work after surgery pages 10-12.

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