

Case Number:	CM14-0109310		
Date Assigned:	08/01/2014	Date of Injury:	11/18/2004
Decision Date:	10/20/2014	UR Denial Date:	06/25/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	07/14/2014

HOW THE IMR FINAL DETERMINATION WAS MADE

MAXIMUS Federal Services sent the complete case file to an expert reviewer. He/she has no affiliation with the employer, employee, providers or the claims administrator. The expert reviewer is Board Certified in Preventative Medicine, has a subspecialty in Occupational Medicine and is licensed to practice in Iowa. He/she has been in active clinical practice for more than five years and is currently working at least 24 hours a week in active practice. The expert reviewer was selected based on his/her clinical experience, education, background, and expertise in the same or similar specialties that evaluate and/or treat the medical condition and disputed items/services. He/she is familiar with governing laws and regulations, including the strength of evidence hierarchy that applies to Independent Medical Review determinations.

CLINICAL CASE SUMMARY

The expert reviewer developed the following clinical case summary based on a review of the case file, including all medical records:

This patient is a 52 year old employee with date of injury of 11/18/2004. The medical records indicate the patient is undergoing treatment for lumbago, depressive disorder and L4 radiculopathy. The subjective complaints include the patient finds Exalgo, 16mg 50% effective but cause sedation and it lowers her blood pressure. Dilaudid, 4mg is prescribed for 1-3 times a day but the patient is taking up to 6 per day. She says that combination of the two medications is "90% effective". On medication she says she can do activities of daily living and can play with her dogs. Her mood is still depressed, suicidal. The patient is taking up to 6 Norco a day despite the fact she was supposed to be weaning down over a two month period. She says she's willing to wean down but has very few pills left. She notes that her neuropathic pain (L4 radiculopathy) is helped with Gabapentin. Objective findings include on exam, she walks with an antalgic gait. Her back is tender in the paraspinal lumbar area and she has a positive straight leg raise bilaterally. Her lower extremities have intact sensation and her strength is 3/5 bilaterally. Treatment has consisted of PT with stretches, Replax, Sertraline, Exalgo 16mg; Dilaudid 4mg taken 1-3 times a day; Norco; Gabapentin; set of three L5 transforaminal injections. A psychiatry visits have been approved but a provider has not yet been located. The utilization review determination was rendered on 6/25/2014 recommending non-certification of Exalgo 16mg #30 with 2 refills and Norco 10/325mg #180 with 2 refills.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

The Final Determination was based on decisions for the disputed items/services set forth below:

Exalgo 16mg #30 with 2 refills: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids, Page(s): 51, 74-96. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) Pain, Opioids

Decision rationale: Per MTUS, Hydromorphone (Exalgo) is the generic name of Dilaudid, which is a pure agonist/short acting opioid and "they are often used for intermittent or breakthrough pain." The ODG does not recommend the use of opioids for low back pain "except for short use for severe cases, not to exceed 2 weeks." The patient has exceeded the 2 week recommended treatment length for opioid usage. The MTUS does not discourage use of opioids past 2 weeks, but does state that "ongoing review and documentation of pain relief, functional status, appropriate medication use, and side effects. Pain assessment should include: current pain; the least reported pain over the period since last assessment; average pain; intensity of pain after taking the opioid; how long it takes for pain relief; and how long pain relief lasts. Satisfactory response to treatment may be indicated by the patient's decreased pain, increased level of function, or improved quality of life." The treating physician documents that the patient does get some pain relief and improved functionality from the medication but also details adverse side effects from Exalgo. The patient has reported increased depression and sedation while on Exalgo. The patient is also taking up to 6 doses of Exalgo a day which is in excess of the 1-3 tablets prescribed by the treating physician. The utilization reviewer on 6/25/14 recommends weaning due to adverse side effects. As such, the request for Exalgo 16mg #30 with 2 refills is not medically necessary.

Norco 10/325mg #180 with 2 refills: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids Page(s): 74-96. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG), Low Back - Lumbar & Thoracic (Acute & Chronic), Opioids, Pain

Decision rationale: The ODG does not recommend the use of opioids for low back pain "except for short use for severe cases, not to exceed 2 weeks." The patient has exceeded the 2 week recommended treatment length for opioid usage. MTUS does not discourage use of opioids past 2 weeks, but does state that "ongoing review and documentation of pain relief, functional status, appropriate medication use, and side effects. Pain assessment should include: current pain; the least reported pain over the period since last assessment; average pain; intensity of pain after taking the opioid; how long it takes for pain relief; and how long pain relief lasts. Satisfactory response to treatment may be indicated by the patient's decreased pain, increased level of function, or improved quality of life." The treating physician previously noted that Norco did not provide pain relief and improved functionality. The treating physician previously indicated that

he would start the weaning process after review on 3/5/14 recommend weaning of Norco. As such, the question for Norco 325/10mg#180 with 2 refills is not medically necessary.