

Case Number:	CM14-0159701		
Date Assigned:	10/03/2014	Date of Injury:	09/13/2012
Decision Date:	10/29/2014	UR Denial Date:	09/19/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	09/29/2014

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 Occupational Medicine and is licensed to practice in California. 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:

There were 43 pages provided for this review. The application for independent medical review was signed on September 29, 2014. It was a request for continued aquatic therapy for six visits for low back pain. The medical records do not indicate the patient has any limited weight-bearing status or inability to participate in a land-based program. The patient still has four aquatic therapy sessions remaining from the most recent certification. The physical therapy progress notes do not document significant functional objective range of motion measurements. The patient had back surgery back in 2013. Ongoing formal physical therapy as opposed to participation in a self-directed home exercise program is not appropriate. The patient is now one year and seven months out from the surgery.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Continued aquatic therapy 6 visits low back pain: Upheld

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

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Page(s): 98 of 127. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) Back regard aquatic therapy.

Decision rationale: The MTUS does permit forms of physical therapy in chronic situations, noting that one should allow for fading of treatment frequency (from up to 3 visits per week to 1 or less), plus active self-directed home Physical Medicine. The conditions mentioned are Myalgia and myositis, unspecified (ICD9 729.1): 9-10 visits over 8 weeks; Neuralgia, neuritis, and radiculitis, unspecified (ICD9 729.2) 8-10 visits over 4 weeks; and Reflex sympathetic dystrophy (CRPS) (ICD9 337.2): 24 visits over 16 weeks. This claimant does not have these conditions. Moreover, it is not clear why warm water aquatic therapy would be chosen over land therapy. Finally, after prior sessions, it is not clear why the patient would not be independent with self-care at this point. Specifically regarding aquatic therapy, the guides note under Aquatic Therapy: Recommended as an optional form of exercise therapy, where available, as an alternative to land-based physical therapy. Aquatic therapy (including swimming) can minimize the effects of gravity, so it is specifically recommended where reduced weight bearing is desirable, for example extreme obesity. In this case, there is no evidence of conditions that would drive a need for aquatic therapy, or a need for reduced weight bearing. Finally, there are especially strong caveats in the MTUS/ACOEM guidelines against over treatment in the chronic situation supporting the clinical notion that the move to independence and an active, independent home program is clinically in the best interest of the patient. They cite: 1. Although mistreating or under treating pain is of concern, an even greater risk for the physician is over treating the chronic pain patient. Over treatment often results in irreparable harm to the patient's socioeconomic status, home life, personal relationships, and quality of life in general. 2. A patient's complaints of pain should be acknowledged. Patient and clinician should remain focused on the ultimate goal of rehabilitation leading to optimal functional recovery, decreased healthcare utilization, and maximal self-actualization. This request for aquatic therapy was appropriately not medically necessary.