MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM14-0176633		
Date Assigned:	10/29/2014	Date of Injury:	06/23/2004
Decision Date:	12/05/2014	UR Denial Date:	10/21/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	10/24/2014

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:

The applicant is a represented [redacted] employee who has filed a claim for chronic low back pain reportedly associated with an industrial injury of June 23, 2004.Thus far, the applicant has been treated with the following: Analgesic medications; earlier laminectomy surgery; unspecified amounts of physical therapy; and implantation of a spinal cord stimulator. In a Utilization Review Report dated October 21, 2014, the claims administrator denied a request for Norco elixir. The applicant's attorney subsequently appealed. In a November 4, 2014 progress note, the applicant posited that the combination of hydrocodone elixir plus oral gabapentin was generating some improvement. The applicant was not working; however, it was acknowledged, owing to complaints of extreme pain. The applicant stated that she was having difficulty performing activities of daily living as basic as getting in and out of a shower, sleeping, and putting on her shoes at times, owing to severe pain complaints. The applicant stated that her pain had worsened. The applicant reported an average score of 7-8/10 pain, sometimes as high as 8-9/10 without medications versus 6/10 with medications. The applicant stated that she was having heightened multifocal pain complaints secondary to cold weather and also reiterated that she was having difficulty sleeping. The applicant's medication list included baclofen, hydrocodone elixir, lidocaine pads, and Neurontin. In an earlier note dated October 16, 2014, the applicant reported heightened complaints of low back pain radiating into the left leg. The applicant reported concerns about giving way and falling. The applicant had to use a walker, brace, and specialized shoe to move about, it was suggested. The applicant stated that she was having difficulty performing exercises secondary to pain.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco Elixir 10/200 3 doses (tsp) by mouth four times a day #300ml, quantity 1: Upheld

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

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines When to Continue Opioids Page(s): 80.

Decision rationale: As noted on page 80 of the MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines, the cardinal criteria for continuation of opioid therapy include evidence of successful return to work, improved functioning, and/or reduced pain achieved as a result of the same. In this case, the applicant is off of work, it is acknowledged. The applicant is no longer working at [redacted]. While the applicant has reported some reduction in pain scores achieved as a result of ongoing medication usage, including ongoing Norco usage, this is, however, outweighed by the applicant's failure to return to work and reported difficulty to perform activities of daily living as basic as getting in and out of a shower, sleeping, putting on her shoes, standing, walking, etc. All of the foregoing, taken together, does not make a compelling case for continuation of the Norco elixir at issue. Therefore, the request is not medically necessary.