

Case Number:	CM14-0036758		
Date Assigned:	06/30/2014	Date of Injury:	10/29/1991
Decision Date:	08/11/2014	UR Denial Date:	02/26/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	03/26/2014

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 Neurology, has a subspecialty in Neuromuscular Medicine and is licensed to practice in New Jersey. 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 patient is a 58-year-old woman who sustained a work-related injury on October 29, 1991. Subsequently, she developed back pain. This is a chronic injury over 22 years old. According to the medical record dated April 14, 2014 symptoms are constant chronic low back pain 3/10 that is not radicular. There has been no reinjury. Her physical examination revealed limited range of motion; left SLR with low back pain; ankle reflex is slightly less on left. No neurologic deficits are noted in the lower extremities. The patient has stopped going to physical therapy but out-of-pocket she is seeing a chiropractor and attending acupuncture. The patient has been diagnosed with lumbago, lumbar myalgia, lumbar myospasm, spinal stenosis and degenerative disc disease. The provider requested authorization for MRI of the lumbar spine.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

MRI OF LUMBAR SPINE: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Page(s): 303.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 303.

Decision rationale: Regarding the indications for imaging in case of back pain, MTUS guidelines stated: “Lumbar spine x rays should not be recommended in patients with low back pain in the absence of red flags for serious spinal pathology, even if the pain has persisted for at least six weeks. However, it may be appropriate when the physician believes it would aid in patient management. Unequivocal objective findings that identify specific nerve compromise on the neurologic examination are sufficient evidence to warrant imaging in patients who do not respond to treatment and who would consider surgery an option. When the neurologic examination is less clear, however, further physiologic evidence of nerve dysfunction should be obtained before ordering an imaging study. Indiscriminant imaging will result in false-positive findings, such as disk bulges, that are not the source of painful symptoms and do not warrant surgery. If physiologic evidence indicates tissue insult or nerve impairment, the practitioner can discuss with a consultant the selection of an imaging test to define a potential cause (magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] for neural or other soft tissue, computer tomography [CT] for bony structures).” Furthermore, and according to MTUS guidelines, MRI is the test of choice for patients with prior back surgery, fracture or tumors that may require surgery. The patient does not have any clear evidence of lumbar radiculopathy or nerve root compromise. There is no clear evidence of significant change in the patient signs or symptoms suggestive of new pathology. There is no clear evidence of failure of conservative treatment. There is no indication that this patient is candidate for surgery. Therefore, the request for MRI of the lumbar spine is not medically necessary.