

Case Number:	CM14-0061786		
Date Assigned:	07/14/2014	Date of Injury:	08/24/2002
Decision Date:	08/22/2014	UR Denial Date:	04/29/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	05/02/2014

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 August 24, 2002. Thus far, the applicant has been treated with the following: Analgesic medications; attorney representations; opioid therapy; unspecified amounts of physical therapy; muscle relaxants; and transfer of care to and from various providers in various specialties. In a Utilization Review Report dated April 29, 2014, the claims administrator partially certified Norco, apparently for weaning purposes. In a progress note dated July 22, 2013, the applicant was described as presenting with persistent complaints of low back pain. The applicant was described as having failed a prior lumbar spine surgery. The applicant was using Lipitor, Norco, Plavix, Voltaren, aspirin, isosorbide dinitrate, and Lopressor. Neurontin and Norco were refilled on this occasion. The applicant's work status was not clearly outlined. In a progress note dated May 15, 2014, handwritten, difficult to follow, not entirely legible, the applicant was described as using Norco and Robaxin for pain relief. It was acknowledged that the applicant had ongoing complaints of low back pain and was "not working." In a narrative report of May 15, 2014, the applicant was described as filing for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The applicant was using three to six Norco a day. The applicant stated that Norco was allowing him to prepare meals, do dishes, laundry, light housekeeping, take walks, and visit friends. Neurontin was ameliorating the applicant's leg pain, it was noted. The applicant stated that he had eschewed alcohol consumption. The applicant stated that he was no longer drinking. A variety of medications were refilled. The attending provider stated that urine drug testing of December 2013 was consistent with prescribed medications.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

1 prescription for Norco 10/325 mg # 180 with 1 refill.: Overturned

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 topic 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, while the applicant is off of work, the attending provider has established the presence of ongoing analgesia achieved as a result of ongoing Norco usage. The attending provider stated, moreover, that ongoing usage of Norco has ameliorated the applicant's ability to stand, walk, do housekeeping, do dishes, do laundry, prepare meals, and socialize with others. Continuing Norco then, on balance, is indicated, although it is acknowledged that the applicant has failed to return to work. Therefore, the request is medically necessary.