

Case Number:	CM14-0067623		
Date Assigned:	07/11/2014	Date of Injury:	01/25/2011
Decision Date:	11/19/2014	UR Denial Date:	05/01/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	05/12/2014

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 51-year-old man who sustained a work-related injury on January 25, 2011. Subsequently, he developed chronic bilateral wrist/hand pain. Prior treatment has included medications; wrist surgeries (approximately 6 months apart) performed in 2012, which helped with range of motion; injections to the bilateral hands (of no benefit); and physical therapy. Physical therapy was initiated to the bilateral wrists, which consisted of hand manipulation. The patient received several weeks of therapy, which was of no benefit. According to a progress report dated October 6, 2014, the patient reported that the right wrist surgery helped alleviate his complaints; however, over time, his symptoms in his bilateral wrists have returned. He related that he has poor fine motor senses with little to no grip strength, right worse than left. He also complained of swelling in his arms, right worse than left. At times, the patient stated that his hands locks into a fist position. EMG/NCV study performed on May 12, 2014 documented evidence of moderate to severe median motor-sensory nerve entrapment at the wrist bilaterally (carpal tunnel syndrome). There was no evidence of cervical radiculopathy in both upper extremities. Examination of the cervical spine revealed an increased tone with associated tenderness about the paracervical and trapezial muscles. No trigger points. There was some guarding on examination. The cervical compression test was negative. Examination of the bilateral wrist/hands revealed no tenderness and no crepitus. The Tinel's test was positive on the left hand. The Phalen's test was positive in both hands. The range of motion was limited by pain. The patient was diagnosed with bilateral wrist carpal tunnel syndrome, status post bilateral wrist carpal tunnel releases, and right thumb trigger release. The provider requested authorization for physical therapy.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Physical Therapy to bilateral hands: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Page(s): 98-99.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Physical Medicine Page(s): 98.

Decision rationale: According to MTUS guidelines, Physical Medicine is recommended as indicated below. Passive therapy (those treatment modalities that do not require energy expenditure on the part of the patient) can provide short term relief during the early phases of pain treatment and are directed at controlling symptoms such as pain, inflammation and swelling and to improve the rate of healing soft tissue injuries. They can be used sparingly with active therapies to help control swelling, pain and inflammation during the rehabilitation process. Active therapy is based on the philosophy that therapeutic exercise and/or activity are beneficial for restoring flexibility, strength, endurance, function, range of motion, and can alleviate discomfort. Active therapy requires an internal effort by the individual to complete a specific exercise or task. This form of therapy may require supervision from a therapist or medical provider such as verbal, visual and/or tactile instruction(s). Patients are instructed and expected to continue active therapies at home as an extension of the treatment process in order to maintain improvement levels. Home exercise can include exercise with or without mechanical assistance or resistance and functional activities with assistive devices. (Colorado, 2002) (Airaksinen, 2006) Patient-specific hand therapy is very important in reducing swelling, decreasing pain, and improving range of motion in CRPS. (Li, 2005) The use of active treatment modalities (e.g., exercise, education, activity modification) instead of passive treatments is associated with substantially better clinical outcomes. In a large case series of patients with low back pain treated by physical therapists, those adhering to guidelines for active rather than passive treatments incurred fewer treatment visits, cost less, and had less pain and less disability. The overall success rates were 64.7% among those adhering to the active treatment recommendations versus 36.5% for passive treatment. (Fritz, 2007). In this case, there is documentation of inefficacy of previous physical therapy sessions. There is no documentation that the patient cannot perform home exercise. Therefore, Physical therapy to bilateral hands is not medically necessary.