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| Case Number: | CM14-0190031 | | |
| Date Assigned: | 11/21/2014 | Date of Injury: | 09/13/2010 |
| Decision Date: | 01/12/2015 | UR Denial Date: | 10/24/2014 |
| Priority: | Standard | Application Received: | 11/14/2014 |

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 November 13, 2010. In a Utilization Review Report dated October 24, 2014, the claims administrator failed to approve a request for Norco. The claims administrator cited a March 20, 2014 progress note in the body of its report. It appeared, thus, this was a retrospective review. The applicant's attorney subsequently appealed. In a March 20, 2014 progress note, the applicant reported persistent complaints of low back pain, 1/10 at present, alleviated by medications, rest, and a TENS unit. Previous epidurals had been helpful, the attending provider posited. The applicant was using Norco 10/325 at a rate of one to two tablets twice daily, Lopressor, naproxen, Tizanidine, and tramadol, it was acknowledged. The applicant was using alcohol sparingly, once or twice monthly, and was also smoking. Multiple medications were refilled, including Norco. The applicant was seemingly returned to regular duty work (on paper), although it was unclear whether the applicant was or was not working. In an earlier note dated September 13, 2013, the applicant reported persistent complaints of low back pain, exacerbated by lifting articles weighing greater than 5-10 pounds. Massage therapy was endorsed. The applicant attributed her symptoms to an industrial motor vehicle accident. In a June 6, 2014 progress note, the applicant again reported persistent complaints of low back pain, 3/10, alleviated by medications and a TENS unit. Norco, tramadol, and Tizanidine were refilled. The applicant, once again, was returned to regular duty work (on paper). In an October 18, 2013 progress note, the applicant was described as "working full time-full duty." The applicant stated that she was working as an inventory clerk of some kind. The applicant had posited that her medications were diminishing her pain complaints, which were, at times, as high as 8/10 without medications. The applicant was asked to employ tramadol for moderate pain and Norco only for severe pain purposes.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Retro Norco 10/325 #90 with 2 refills: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 10 Elbow Disorders (Revised 2007), 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. Here, the applicant has returned to and/or maintained full-time, regular duty work status as an inventory clerk; it has been suggested and/or stated outright on several occasions, referenced above. The applicant, per the requesting provider's progress notes, is deriving an appropriate reduction in pain scores with ongoing Norco usage. Continuing the same, on balance, thus, was indicated. Therefore, the request was medically necessary.