

Case Number:	CM14-0199004		
Date Assigned:	12/08/2014	Date of Injury:	04/04/2005
Decision Date:	01/21/2015	UR Denial Date:	10/27/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	11/25/2014

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 36-year-old man who sustained a work related injury on April 4, 2005. Subsequently, he developed chronic low back pain for which he underwent an L4-5 fusion with instrumentation in 2008. MRI of the lumbar spine showed a 3 mm disc bulge at L3-4 above the prior fusion and a rudimentary L5-S1 disc. No derangement of the facet joints was documented. According to a follow-up report dated September 22, 2014, the patient complained of low back pain somewhat increased, with more stiffness, with change in weather. The patient reported that medications help to manage pain. Physical examination revealed tenderness of the lumbar paraspinus muscles. There was discomfort with lumbar range of motion. Straight leg raising test was negative. There was no significant sacroiliac tenderness. The patient was diagnosed with post lumbar fusion, axial pain, and myofascial pain. The provider requested authorization for Diagnostic Lumbar Medial Branch Blocks Bilateral L4-5, L5-S1, IV sedation, and fluoroscopy.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Diagnostic Lumbar Medial Branch Blocks Bilateral L4-5, L5-S1, IV sedation, fluoroscopy:
Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints
Page(s): 309.

Decision rationale: According MTUS guidelines, "Invasive techniques (e.g., local injections and facet-joint injections of cortisone and lidocaine) are of questionable merit. Although epidural steroid injections may afford short-term improvement in leg pain and sensory deficits in patients with nerve root compression due to a herniated nucleus pulposus, this treatment offers no significant long term functional benefit, nor does it reduce the need for surgery. Despite the fact that proof is still lacking, many pain physicians believe that diagnostic and/or therapeutic injections may have benefit in patients presenting in the transitional phase between acute and chronic pain." Regarding facets injections, ODG guidelines indicate: "Under study. Current evidence is conflicting as to this procedure and at this time no more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is suggested. If successful (pain relief of at least 50% for a duration of at least 6 weeks), the recommendation is to proceed to a medial branch diagnostic block and subsequent neurotomy (if the medial branch block is positive). If a therapeutic facet joint block is undertaken, it is suggested that it be used in consort with other evidence based conservative care (activity, exercise, etc.) to facilitate functional improvement. (Dreyfuss, 2003) (Colorado, 2001) (Manchikanti , 2003) (Boswell, 2005) See Segmental rigidity (diagnosis). In spite of the overwhelming lack of evidence for the long-term effectiveness of intra-articular steroid facet joint injections, this remains a popular treatment modality. Intra-articular facet joint injections have been popularly utilized as a therapeutic procedure, but are not currently recommended as a treatment modality in most evidence-based reviews as their benefit remains controversial." Furthermore, ODG guidelines state, "Criteria for use of therapeutic intra-articular and medial branch blocks, are as follows: 1. No more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is recommended. 2. There should be no evidence of radicular pain, spinal stenosis, or previous fusion. 3. If successful (initial pain relief of 70%, plus pain relief of at least 50% for a duration of at least 6 weeks), the recommendation is to proceed to a medial branch diagnostic block and subsequent neurotomy (if the medial branch block is positive). 4. No more than 2 joint levels may be blocked at any one time. 5. There should be evidence of a formal plan of additional evidence-based activity and exercise in addition to facet joint injection." In this case, there is no documentation of facet mediated pain; there is no clear evidence or documentation that lumbar and sacral facets are main pain generator. There is no clear documentation that the patient failed conservative therapies. Therefore, the Diagnostic Lumbar Medial Branch Blocks Bilateral L4-5, L5-S1, IV sedation, fluoroscopy is not medically necessary.