

Case Number:	CM15-0001180		
Date Assigned:	01/12/2015	Date of Injury:	09/17/2012
Decision Date:	03/09/2015	UR Denial Date:	12/09/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	01/05/2015

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. 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/Service. He/she is familiar with governing laws and regulations, including the strength of evidence hierarchy that applies to Independent Medical Review determinations.

The Expert Reviewer has the following credentials:
 State(s) of Licensure: New Jersey, Michigan, California
 Certification(s)/Specialty: Neurology, Neuromuscular Medicine

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 injured worker is a 51-year-old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 09/17/2012. He has reported right thumb pain. The diagnoses have included status post right trigger thumb release and right thumb flexor tenosynovitis. Treatment to date has included right trigger thumb release on 08/19/2014, physical therapy, and oral pain medication. The initial physical therapy report dated 09/03/2014 was included in the medical records provided for review. The treating provider recommended the continuation of the current plan in order to restore function and decrease symptoms in the right thumb. Currently, the injured worker complains right thumb pain, which was improving with therapy. The objective findings included positive right Tinel's sign; positive right elbow flexion test; negative Phalen's test; mild tenderness over the A1 pulley of the right thumb without triggering. The treating physician requested additional physical therapy for the right thumb/hand to work on range of motion, modalities, and strengthening. On 12/09/2014, Utilization Review (UR) non-certified the request for additional physical therapy for the right thumb/hand two (2) times a week for six (6) weeks, noting that the injured worker should be well versed in a strong home exercise program. The Postsurgical Treatment Guidelines were cited.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Additional physical therapy for right thumb/hand 2x6: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Postsurgical Treatment Guidelines.

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, the patient has completed 18 physical therapy visits as of September 3, 2014. According to the progress report dated November 18, 2014, the patient reported that his right thumb strength and pain was improving with therapy. at this point, a transition to a home based exercise program is recommended.