

<b>Case Number:</b>	CM15-0100359		
<b>Date Assigned:</b>	06/02/2015	<b>Date of Injury:</b>	07/02/2010
<b>Decision Date:</b>	07/08/2015	<b>UR Denial Date:</b>	04/24/2015
<b>Priority:</b>	Standard	<b>Application Received:</b>	05/26/2015

### 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, Alabama, 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 56-year-old female, who sustained an industrial/work injury on 7/2/10. She reported initial complaints of neck and back pain. The injured worker was diagnosed as having cervical radiculopathy, lumbar spondylosis, lumbar post-laminectomy syndrome, and chronic pain syndrome. Treatment to date has included medication, surgery, aquatic therapy, exercise, acupuncture, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) unit, psychological care, epidural steroid injections. MRI results were reported three level degenerative disease. The cervical spine report noted on 7/5/11 mild degenerative changes with conspicuous perineural cyst on the left C7-T1. Currently, the injured worker complains of chronic severe neck and low back pain with left lower extremity numbness, tingling, and weakness. Pain was reported at 10/10 without medication and 2/10 with medication. Per the primary physician's progress report (PR-2) on 4/7/15, examination revealed left foot drop, tenderness with palpation at C6-7 and L3-4, positive Spurling's to the left, spasm to the cervical and lumbar areas, decreased sensation to left C7, L3, L4, L5 S1 and left T1. The requested treatments include one bilateral facet injection at L2-L3 levels under fluoroscopy.

### IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

**One bilateral facet injection at L2-L3 levels under 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 based on Non-MTUS Citation Facet joint intra-articular injections (therapeutic blocks) ([http://worklossdatainstitute.verioiponly.com/odgtwc/low\\_back.htm#Facetjointinjections](http://worklossdatainstitute.verioiponly.com/odgtwc/low_back.htm#Facetjointinjections)).

**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." According to ODG guidelines regarding facets injections, "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 and according to ODG guidelines, "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". The ODG guidelines did not support facet injection for lumbar pain in this clinical context. In addition, there is no clear evidence or documentation that lumbar facets are main pain generator. The provider did not document formal plan of additional evidence-based activity and exercise in addition to facet joint injection. Therefore, the request for Ine bilateral facet injection at L2-L3 levels under fluoroscopy is not medically necessary.