

Case Number:	CM15-0104987		
Date Assigned:	06/09/2015	Date of Injury:	02/05/2013
Decision Date:	07/15/2015	UR Denial Date:	05/29/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	06/01/2015

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: North Carolina
 Certification(s)/Specialty: Family Practice

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 61 year old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 2/5/13. He reported low back pain. The injured worker was diagnosed as having mechanical low back pain, left L5-S1 radiculopathy with weakness and degenerative joint disease of the lumbosacral spine. Treatment to date has included oral medications including opioids, physical therapy, water aerobics and home exercise program. (MRI) magnetic resonance imaging of lumbar spine performed on 2/25/15 revealed posterior disc protrusion at L5-S1 with varying degrees of degenerative posterior disc changes at L3-L4 and L4-L5. Currently, the injured worker complains of pain in middle low back with radiation to left low back and down left lateral leg, it is constant and achy. He rates the pain 6-7/10 without medications and 3-4/10 with medications. He notes he does not use his medications regularly. He is currently not working, but would like to return to work. Physical exam noted ambulation and transfers with guarded posture, restricted range of motion and tenderness to palpation across mid to lower lumbar spine. A request for authorization was submitted for bilateral medial branch injections at L5-S1.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Medial Branch Injection Bilaterally L5-S1: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines, Work Loss Data Institute, Low Back, Lumbar and Thoracic (Acute and Chronic).

MAXIMUS guideline: The Expert Reviewer did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation ODG, medial branch block.

Decision rationale: The ACOEM states: 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. Per the ODG, facet joint injections are under study. Current evidence is conflicting as to this procedure and at this time, no more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is suggested. Intra-articular facet joint injections have been popularly utilized as a therapeutic procedure, but are currently not recommended as a treatment modality in most evidence based reviews, as their benefit remains controversial. Criteria for use of diagnostic blocks for facet nerve pain: 1. One set of diagnostic medial branch blocks is required with a response of 70%; 2. Limited to non-radicular cervical pain and no more than 2 levels bilaterally; 3. Documentation of failure of conservative therapy; 4. No more than 2 joint levels are injected in 1 session; 5. Diagnostic facet blocks should be performed in patients whom a surgical procedure is anticipated. The requested service is not recommended per the ACOEM or the Official Disability Guidelines. When recommended it is for non-radicular pain. The patient's pain on physical exam is radicular and therefore the request is not medically necessary.