MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM15-0130168		
Date Assigned:	07/17/2015	Date of Injury:	08/09/2011
Decision Date:	08/12/2015	UR Denial Date:	06/24/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	07/06/2015

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 45 year old male patient who sustained an industrial injury on 08/09/2011. The accident occurred while the worker was performing regular job duty as a heavy equipment operator for a construction company. He was operating a dirt hauler truck and it went over an embankment and rolled down. A pain management follow up visit dated 12/01/2014 reported the patient having had received a C7-T1 epidural steroid injection with noted an approximate pain reduction of 20% overall relief; although he is still with significant pain described as shooting sharp limiting neck pain. He also has intensifying pain through the lower back and left posterior lower extremity. There was recommendation to add Gabapentin to the current regimen. A more recent visit dated 01/21/2015 reported the following treating diagnoses: cervicalgia; cervical degenerative disc disease; cervical stenosis status post anterior decompression, fusion at C4-5; cervical radiculopathy; non-union fusion; back pain, and tobacco disorder. The plan of care noted the patient undergoing magnetic resonance imaging study of lumbar spine.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco (Rx for June & July) 10/325mg #60: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids, Criteria for use. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG), Pain Chapter - Online Version, Opioids, criteria for use.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Criteria for use of opioids Page(s): 76-79.

Decision rationale: According to MTUS guidelines, Norco (Hydrocodone/Acetaminophen) is a synthetic opioid indicated for the pain management but not recommended as a first line oral analgesic. In addition and according to MTUS guidelines, ongoing use of opioids should follow specific rules: (a) Prescriptions from a single practitioner taken as directed, and all prescriptions from a single pharmacy. (b) The lowest possible dose should be prescribed to improve pain and function. (c) Office: Ongoing review and documentation of pain relief, functional status, appropriate medication use, and side effects. Four domains have been proposed as most relevant for ongoing monitoring of chronic pain patients on opioids: pain relief, side effects, physical and psychosocial functioning, and the occurrence of any potentially aberrant (or non adherent) drug-related behaviors. These domains have been summarized as the "4 A's" (analgesia, activities of daily living, adverse side effects, and aberrant drug taking behaviors). The monitoring of these outcomes over time should affect therapeutic decisions and provide a framework. According to the patient's file, there is no objective documentation of pain and functional improvement to justify continuous use of Norco. Norco was used for longtime without documentation of functional improvement or evidence of return to work or improvement of activity of daily living. Therefore, the prescription of Norco 10/325mg #60 is not medically necessary.