

Case Number:	CM15-0133085		
Date Assigned:	07/21/2015	Date of Injury:	12/01/1997
Decision Date:	08/17/2015	UR Denial Date:	06/11/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	07/09/2015

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 66-year-old female who sustained an industrial injury on 12/01/1997. Mechanism of injury occurred when she was a cook and was lifting multiple heavy objects. Diagnoses include lumbosacral facet arthropathy, lumbar degenerative disc disease, myofascial pain syndrome, spinal stenosis lumbar region, trochanteric bursitis, and an encounter for therapeutic drug monitoring. Treatment to date has included diagnostic studies, medications, activity modifications, chiropractic sessions, injections, radiofrequency ablation procedures. Her medications include Tramadol, Methoderm ointment, Amlodipine, Loratadine, Meloxicam, Nexium, Sertraline, and Simvastatin. A physician progress note dated 05/27/2015 documents the injured worker complains of low back pain radiating to the buttocks and bilateral thighs. This occurs 90-100% of the time and does not seem to decrease with rest or other measures. She has no side effects from her medications. On examination, cervical range of motion is restricted with extension. There is tenderness present and trigger points noted on both sides. Cervical facet loading is positive on both sides. Lumbar spine range of motion is limited by pain on extension. There is tenderness present and trigger points on both sides. Lumbar facet loading is positive on both sides. She has tenderness present over the trochanter and there are multiple trigger points over the ilio-tibial band, Ober's test was positive. The treatment plan includes continuation of her medications, and exercises as tolerated. Treatment requested is for diagnostic lumbar medial branch block at L3, L4, and L5 under fluoroscopy guidance.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Diagnostic lumbar medial branch block at L3, L4, L5 under fluoroscopy guidance: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: The Claims Administrator did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG), low back chapter, facet joint diagnostic blocks, injections.

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". 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." In this case, the patient did previously ablation with a positive response on 2013 and 2014. The patient has a clear lumbar facet pain and additional diagnosis block is not needed. Therefore, Diagnostic lumbar medial branch block at L3, L4, and L5 under fluoroscopy guidance is not medically necessary.