

Case Number:	CM15-0136003		
Date Assigned:	07/24/2015	Date of Injury:	02/14/2006
Decision Date:	09/17/2015	UR Denial Date:	06/23/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	07/14/2015

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: California

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 65 year old male, who sustained an industrial injury on February 14, 2006. He reported persistent neck pain radiating to the base of the skull and into bilateral upper extremities with associated numbness and tingling. The injured worker was diagnosed as having cervical discopathy with disc displacement, cervical radiculopathy and mood disorder. Treatment to date has included diagnostic studies, conservative care, physical therapy, medications and work restrictions. Currently, the injured worker complains of persistent neck pain radiating to the base of the skull and into bilateral upper extremities with associated numbness and tingling. He also noted depression secondary to chronic pain. The injured worker reported an industrial injury in 2006, resulting in the above noted pain. He was treated conservatively without complete resolution of the pain. Evaluation on October 20, 2014, revealed continued pain as noted with associated symptoms. His work status was temporarily totally disabled. Norco, Ultram, Paxil and Prilosec were continued. Evaluation on March 26, 2015, revealed continued pain as noted. It was noted the medications were "somewhat" helpful. He noted good benefit with previous physical therapy. Hoffman's sign was negative. Medications as noted were renewed. Evaluation on May 30, 2015, revealed continued pain as noted. It was indicated the medications were helping "some". Ultram ER 150mg #90 was requested.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Ultram ER 150mg #90: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines opioids.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids Page(s): 76-78, 80.

Decision rationale: The MTUS/Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines comment on the long-term use of opioids, including Ultram. These guidelines have established criteria of the use of opioids for the ongoing management of pain. Actions should include: prescriptions from a single practitioner and from a single pharmacy. The lowest possible dose should be prescribed to improve pain and function. There should be an ongoing review and documentation of pain relief, functional status, appropriate medication use and side effects. Pain assessment should include: current pain, the least reported pain over the period since last assessment; average pain; intensity of pain after taking the opioid; how long it takes for pain relief; and how long pain relief lasts. Satisfactory response to treatment may be indicated by the patient's decreased pain, increased level of function, or improved quality of life. There should be evidence of documentation of the '4 A's for Ongoing Monitoring. These four domains include: pain relief, side effects, physical and psychological functioning, and the occurrence of any potentially aberrant drug-related behaviors. Further, there should be consideration of a consultation with a multidisciplinary pain clinic if doses of opioids are required beyond what is usually required for the condition or pain that does not improve on opioids in 3 months. There should be consideration of an addiction medicine consult if there is evidence of substance misuse (Pages 76-78). Finally, the guidelines indicate that for back pain, the long-term efficacy of opioids is unclear. Failure to respond to a time-limited course of opioids has led to the suggestion of reassessment and consideration of alternative therapy (Page 80). Based on the review of the medical records, there is insufficient documentation in support of these stated MTUS/Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines for the ongoing use of opioids. There is insufficient documentation of the 4 A's for Ongoing Monitoring. The treatment course of opioids in this patient has extended well beyond the timeframe required for a reassessment of therapy. In summary, there is insufficient documentation to support the chronic use of an opioid in this patient. Treatment with Ultram ER is not considered as medically necessary. In the Utilization Review process, there was a request for both Ultram ER and Norco. The request was modified to provide a limited supply of Norco to allow for opioid weaning. This action is consistent with MTUS guidelines.