MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM15-0137927		
Date Assigned:	07/27/2015	Date of Injury:	09/06/2012
Decision Date:	08/27/2015	UR Denial Date:	06/18/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	07/16/2015

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: Texas, New York, California
Certification(s)/Specialty: Preventive Medicine, Occupational 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 applicant is a represented [redacted] beneficiary who has filed a claim for chronic neck pain reportedly associated with an industrial injury of September 8, 2012. In a Utilization Review report dated June 18, 2015, the claims administrator failed to approve a request for Norco apparently prescribed and/or dispensed on or around May 4, 2015. On July 10, 2015, the applicant reported ongoing complaints of neck, back, and upper extremity pain with associated digital paresthesias. The applicant was on Norco and Motrin for pain relief, it was reported. The applicant was receiving acupuncture, it was reported. The applicant was given a rather proscriptive 10-pound lifting limitation. It was not clearly stated whether the applicant was or was not working with the same. The attending provider maintained that the applicant was benefitting from Norco usage but nevertheless stated that he would try to reduce the applicant's dosage of Norco. The applicant was also asked to try and cease smoking. The attending provider stated that the applicant's usage of Norco was ameliorating her ability to cook and clean and was reducing the applicant's pain scores by 40%.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Hydrocodone-APAP 10/325mg, QTY: 68, DOS: 05/04/15: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Short acting opioids; Opioids, criteria for use.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines 7) When to Continue Opioids Page(s): 80.

Decision rationale: No, the request for hydrocodone-acetaminophen (Norco), a short-acting opioid, was not medically necessary, medically appropriate, or indicated here. As noted on page 80 of the MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines, the cardinal criteria for continuation of opioid therapy include evidence of successful return to work, improved functioning, and/or reduced pain achieved as a result of the same. Here, however, the applicant's work status was not clearly reported on July 10, 2015, although it did not appear that the applicant was working with a rather proscriptive 10-pound lifting limitation in place. While the attending provider recounted reported reduction of pain scores by 40% effected as a result of ongoing Norco usage, these reports were, however, outweighed by the applicant's failure to return to work and the attending provider's failure to outline meaningful, material, and substantive improvements in function (if any). These reports were, however, outweighed by the attending provider's failure to clearly report the applicant's work status and the attending provider's failure to outline meaningful, material, and/or substantive improvements in function effected as a result of ongoing Norco usage (if any). The attending provider's commentary to the effect that the applicant's ability to cook and clean have been ameliorated as a result of ongoing medication consumption did not constitute evidence of a meaningful, material, and/or substantive improvement in function effected as a result of the same. Therefore, the request was not medically necessary.