

Case Number:	CM15-0148946		
Date Assigned:	08/12/2015	Date of Injury:	01/08/2015
Decision Date:	09/14/2015	UR Denial Date:	07/10/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	07/31/2015

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, 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:

This is a 59 year old male patient who sustained an industrial injury on 1-8-15 in a lifting accident resulting in back pain. Diagnoses include lumbar radiculopathy; facet arthropathy. Per the doctor's note dated 7/1/2015, he had complains of intermittent burning lower back pain that radiates into his left leg with numbness. His pain level was 4-7 out of 10. The physical exam of the back and lower extremities revealed decreased range of motion (does not specify if this is referring to the back or legs), paravertebral tenderness to palpation to the inferior facet joints and paraspinal musculature bilaterally, reduced sensation to light touch about the calf muscles, decreased deep tendon reflexes. The medications list includes gabapentin and nabumetone. He has had MRI of the lumbar spine dated 4-14-15 which revealed facet arthropathy at L3-4 with small facet joint effusion, facet arthropathy with fusion at L4-5 with a disc protrusion and annular tear and foraminal narrowing bilaterally and moderate spinal canal stenosis. Treatments to date include 8 sessions of physical therapy; 6 sessions of acupuncture; use of inversion table with benefit; epidural steroid injection without relief of sciatic pain (6-23-15); medication. In the progress note dated 7-1-15 the treating provider's plan of care includes a request for a repeat epidural steroid injection at L4-5.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

1 epidural steroid injection at L4-L5 level: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: The Claims Administrator did not cite any medical evidence for its decision.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Epidural steroid injections (ESIs), page 46.

Decision rationale: 1 epidural steroid injection at L4-L5 level. The MTUS Chronic Pain Guidelines regarding Epidural Steroid Injections state, "The purpose of ESI is to reduce pain and inflammation, restoring range of motion and thereby facilitating progress in more active treatment programs, and avoiding surgery, but this treatment alone offers no significant long-term functional benefit. Epidural steroid injection can offer short term pain relief and use should be in conjunction with other rehab efforts, including continuing a home exercise program." Per the cited guideline criteria for ESI are "1) Radiculopathy must be documented by physical examination and corroborated by imaging studies and/or electrodiagnostic testing. 2) Initially unresponsive to conservative treatment (exercises, physical methods, NSAIDs and muscle relaxants). 7) In the therapeutic phase, repeat blocks should be based on continued objective documented pain and functional improvement, including at least 50% pain relief with associated reduction of medication use for six to eight weeks, with a general recommendation of no more than 4 blocks per region per year." Unequivocal evidence of radiculopathy documented by physical examination and corroborated by imaging studies and/or electro diagnostic testing is not specified in the records provided. As stated above, epidural steroid injection can offer short term pain relief and use should be in conjunction with other rehab efforts, including continuing a home exercise program. Patient had lumbar epidural steroid injection on 6/23/2015. Documented evidence of functional improvement, including at least 50% pain relief with associated reduction of medication use for six to eight weeks with previous lumbar epidural steroid injection is not specified in the records provided. As stated above, ESI alone offers no significant long-term functional benefit. The request is not medically necessary.