MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM15-0187958		
Date Assigned:	09/29/2015	Date of Injury:	11/23/2011
Decision Date:	11/09/2015	UR Denial Date:	09/21/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	09/24/2015

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: North Carolina
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 41 year old female sustained an industrial injury on 11-23-11. Documentation indicated that the injured worker was receiving treatment for chronic low back pain with radiculopathy. Previous treatment included lumbar fusion (July 2013), acupuncture, physical therapy, trigger point injections, functional restoration program, epidural steroid injections and medications. In a pain management reevaluation dated 4-13-15, the injured worker complained of low back pain rated 7 to 8 out of 10. In a follow-up pain management evaluation dated 8-31-15, the physician stated that the injured worker had recently been having severe and intractable low back pain with sciatica symptoms. The injured worker rated her pain 8 to 9 out of 10 without medications. The injured worker stated that Norco kept her functional in activities of daily living but recently she had been having more pain than she could handle. The physician noted that the injured worker underwent lumbar epidural steroid injections on 3-12-15, which provided 70% relief of symptoms for over 8 to 10 weeks. Physical exam was remarkable for "moderate" tenderness to palpation over the lumbar paraspinal musculature, over the bilateral gluteus region and over the L4-5 and L5-S1 vertebral interspaces. With lumbar range of motion 50-60% forward flexion and 60-70% backward extension and lateral bend, all with "mild to moderate" muscle spasms and guarding, positive bilateral straight leg raise and intact sensation to bilateral lower extremities. Documentation indicated that the injured worker had been prescribed Norco since at least 11-11-14. The treatment plan included requesting authorization for lumbar epidural steroid and Cymbalta for depressed mood and continuing Norco 10-325mg up to four a day #140. On 9-17-15, a prescription was written for additional Norco 10-325mg #40. On 9-21-15, Utilization Review noncertified a request for Norco 10-325mg #40.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10/325mg #40 Rx date: 9/17/15: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment 2009.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment 2009, Section(s): Opioids for chronic pain.

Decision rationale: The California chronic pain medical treatment guidelines section on opioids states for ongoing management: On-Going Management. Actions Should Include: (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. 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. Information from family members or other caregivers should be considered in determining the patient's response to treatment. The 4 A's for Ongoing Monitoring: 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 for documentation of the clinical use of these controlled drugs. (Passik, 2000) (d) Home: To aid in pain and functioning assessment, the patient should be requested to keep a pain dairy that includes entries such as pain triggers, and incidence of end-of-dose pain. It should be emphasized that using this diary will help in tailoring the opioid dose. This should not be a requirement for pain management. (e) Use of drug screening or inpatient treatment with issues of abuse, addiction, or poor pain control. (f) Documentation of misuse of medications (doctor-shopping, uncontrolled drug escalation, drug diversion). (g) Continuing review of overall situation with regard to non-opioid means of pain control. (h) 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 does not improve on opioids in 3 months. Consider a psych consult if there is evidence of depression, anxiety or irritability. Consider an addiction medicine consult if there is evidence of substance misuse. When to Continue Opioids: (a) If the patient has returned to work; (b) If the patient has improved functioning and pain. (Washington, 2002) (Colorado, 2002) (Ontario, 2000) (VA/DoD, 2003) (Maddox-AAPM/APS, 1997) (Wisconsin, 2004) (Warfield, 2004) The long-term use of this medication class is not recommended per the California MTUS unless there documented evidence of benefit with measurable outcome measures and improvement in function. There is no documented significant improvement in VAS scores for significant periods of time. There are objective measurements of improvement in function or activity specifically due to the medication. Therefore all criteria for the ongoing use of opioids have not been met and the request is not medically necessary.