

Case Number:	CM15-0196886		
Date Assigned:	10/12/2015	Date of Injury:	03/15/2002
Decision Date:	11/20/2015	UR Denial Date:	10/01/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	10/06/2015

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: Connecticut, California, Virginia
 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 injured worker is a 70-year-old male who sustained an industrial injury on 3-15-2002. Documented treatment includes lumbar fusion, trigger point injection, and medication including Norco and Gabapentin stated to "dramatically improve" his function. On 9-3-2015, the injured worker reported continued moderate back pain. The physician noted thoracolumbar range of motion was "severely limited," with forward flex at 20 degrees and extension at 5 or 10 degrees. The treating physician's plan of care includes Acetaminophen-Hydrocodone 10-325 mg #360, which was modified on 10-1-2015 to #264. He has been using this medication for at least one year. There is no discussion in the records provided discussing urine drug testing, pain agreement or medication behaviors. The injured worker has retired.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Acetaminophen/Hydrocodone 10/325mg, #360 (3 months): Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment 2009, Section(s): Opioids, criteria for use.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment 2009, Section(s): Opioids for chronic pain, Opioids, criteria for use, Opioids, dosing, Opioids, long-term assessment, Opioids, specific drug list, Opioids, steps to avoid misuse/addiction.

Decision rationale: Chronic use of opioids is addressed thoroughly by the MTUS chronic pain guidelines and given the long history of pain in this patient since the initial date of injury, consideration of the MTUS Criteria for Use of Opioids in chronic pain is appropriate. Documentation of pain and functional improvement are critical components, along with documentation of adverse effects. While the MTUS does not specifically detail a set visit frequency for re-evaluation, recommended duration between visits is 1 to 6 months. In this case, the patient clearly warrants close monitoring and treatment, to include close follow up regarding improvement in pain/function; consideration of additional expertise in pain management should be considered if there is no evidence of improvement in the long term. More detailed consideration of long-term treatment goals for pain (specifically aimed at decreased need for opioids), and further elaboration on dosing expectations in this case would be valuable. Consideration of other pain treatment modalities and adjuvants is also recommended. Utilization Review reasonably modified the request to facilitate treatment until follow up (66 days based on UR conversation per documentation). Given the lack of clear evidence to support functional improvement on the medication and the chronic risk of continued treatment, the modification to 264 tablets until follow up is reasonable, and therefore the initial request is not medically necessary.