

Case Number:	CM15-0204164		
Date Assigned:	10/21/2015	Date of Injury:	08/05/2013
Decision Date:	12/02/2015	UR Denial Date:	09/16/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	10/16/2015

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: California, Oregon,
 Washington Certification(s)/Specialty: Orthopedic
 Surgery

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 58 year old female who sustained an industrial injury August 5, 2013. Diagnoses are chronic lumbosacral strain with L4-5 and L5-S1 degenerative disc disease, right radiculitis; chronic cervical spine strain with right radiculitis. Past treatment included 8 sessions of physical therapy, 8 sessions of chiropractic treatment, and 8 treatments of acupuncture, which the injured worker noted helped. On March 25, 2015, a treating physician documented; "lumbar epidural cortisone injection was denied on February 25, 2015". At that visit, she was to continue with heat and home exercise program. According to the most recent follow-up orthopedic visit dated June 3, 2015, the injured worker presented with complaints of neck pain, rated 6 out of 10, right-sided and low back pain, rated 2-4 out of 10, right-sided. Objective findings included; Phalen's and Finkelstein tests are negative right and left and Tinel's sign negative right and left; sensation is intact in all dermatomes in the lower extremities; Babinski and Hoffman's sign and clonus are negative. The injured worker reported that yoga and exercises help her neck pain. At issue is a request for authorization dated September 9, 2015 for lumbar epidural cortisone injections L4-5 and L5-S1, right. An MRI of the lumbar spine dated September 18, 2014, (report present in the medical record) impression as; L5-S1 moderate to severe left and mild to moderate right foraminal stenosis; L3-4 central protrusion with mild central canal stenosis; L4-5 small left paracentral protrusion and annular fissure, mild right foraminal stenosis. According to utilization review dated September 16, 2015, the request for lumbar epidural cortisone injections L4-5, and L5-S1 right, is non-certified.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Lumbar epidural cortisone injections @ L4-L5 and L5-S1, right: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Low Back Complaints 2004, and Chronic Pain Medical Treatment 2009.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment 2009, Section(s): Epidural steroid injections (ESIs).

Decision rationale: According to the CA MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines, Epidural injections, page 46. "Recommended as an option for treatment of radicular pain (defined as pain in dermatomal distribution with corroborative findings of radiculopathy)." Specifically the guidelines state that radiculopathy must be documented by physical examination and corroborated by imaging studies and/or electrodiagnostic testing. Research has now shown that, on average, less than two injections are required for a successful ESI outcome. Current recommendations suggest a second epidural injection if partial success is produced with the first injection, and a third ESI is rarely recommended. 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. The American Academy of Neurology recently concluded that epidural steroid injections may lead to an improvement in radicular lumbosacral pain between 2 and 6 weeks following the injection, but they do not affect impairment of function or the need for surgery and do not provide long-term pain relief beyond 3 months. In addition there must be demonstration of unresponsiveness to conservative treatment (exercises, physical methods, NSAIDs and muscle relaxants). CA MTUS criteria for epidural steroid injections are: Note: 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. 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). 3) Injections should be performed using fluoroscopy (live x-ray) for guidance. 4) If used for diagnostic purposes, a maximum of two injections should be performed. A second block is not recommended if there is inadequate response to the first block. Diagnostic blocks should be at an interval of at least one to two weeks between injections. 5) No more than two nerve root levels should be injected using transforaminal blocks. 6) No more than one interlaminar level should be injected at one session. 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. (Manchikanti, 2003) (CMS, 2004) (Boswell, 2007) 8) Current research does not support a "series-of-three" injections in either the diagnostic or therapeutic phase. We recommend no more than 2 ESI injections. In this case the exam notes from 6/3/15 do not demonstrate a failure of conservative management nor a clear evidence of a dermatomal distribution of radiculopathy. No more than one interlaminar level should be injected at one session. Therefore the determination is not medically necessary.