

<b>Case Number:</b>	CM15-0207288		
<b>Date Assigned:</b>	10/26/2015	<b>Date of Injury:</b>	09/12/2014
<b>Decision Date:</b>	12/14/2015	<b>UR Denial Date:</b>	09/25/2015
<b>Priority:</b>	Standard	<b>Application Received:</b>	10/21/2015

### 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, District of Columbia, Maryland  
 Certification(s)/Specialty: Anesthesiology, Pain Management

### 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 28 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on 9-12-2014. Diagnoses include lumbar disc herniations and lumbar facet arthropathy. Treatments to date include activity modification, anti-inflammatory, NSAID, Tramadol, Gabapentin, and 8 chiropractic therapy sessions and 16 physical therapy sessions. On 9-10-15, she complained of ongoing neck and back pain rated 7 out of 10 VAS. The physical examination documented pain with facet loading bilaterally and tenderness in facet regions. There was decreased lumbar range of motion and decreased strength in lower extremities. The MRI dated 3-20-15, revealed degenerative disc disease, facet arthropathy with retrolisthesis, and disc protrusions. The plan of care included medial branch blocks. The appeal requested authorization for medial branch block bilateral at L4-5 and L5-S1 levels. The Utilization Review dated 9-25-15, denied this request.

### IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

**Medial branch block injection bilaterally at L4-L5 and L5-S1: Upheld**

**Claims Administrator guideline:** Decision based on MTUS Low Back Complaints 2004, Section(s): Physical Methods. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3107686/#](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3107686/#).

**MAXIMUS guideline:** The Expert Reviewer did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) Low Back, Facet joint diagnostic blocks (injections).

**Decision rationale:** Per the ODG guidelines, facet joint medial branch blocks are not recommended except as a diagnostic tool, citing minimal evidence for treatment. The ODG indicates that criteria for facet joint diagnostic blocks (injections) are as follows: 1. One set of diagnostic medial branch blocks is required with a response of = 70%. The pain response should last at least 2 hours for Lidocaine. 2. Limited to patients with low-back pain that is non-radicular and at no more than two levels bilaterally. 3. There is documentation of failure of conservative treatment (including home exercise, PT and NSAIDs) prior to the procedure for at least 4-6 weeks. 4. No more than 2 facet joint levels are injected in one session (see above for medial branch block levels). 5. Recommended volume of no more than 0.5 cc of injectate is given to each joint. 6. No pain medication from home should be taken for at least 4 hours prior to the diagnostic block and for 4 to 6 hours afterward. 7. Opioids should not be given as a "sedative" during the procedure. 8. The use of IV sedation (including other agents such as midazolam) may be grounds to negate the results of a diagnostic block, and should only be given in cases of extreme anxiety. 9. The patient should document pain relief with an instrument such as a VAS scale, emphasizing the importance of recording the maximum pain relief and maximum duration of pain. The patient should also keep medication use and activity logs to support subjective reports of better pain control. 10. Diagnostic facet blocks should not be performed in patients in whom a surgical procedure is anticipated. (Resnick, 2005) 11. Diagnostic facet blocks should not be performed in patients who have had a previous fusion procedure at the planned injection level. [Exclusion Criteria that would require UR physician review: Previous fusion at the targeted level. (Franklin, 2008)] The documentation submitted for review indicates that the injured worker indeed suffers from radiculopathy per clinical findings with noted decreased strength in lower extremities and decreased sensation L4, L5, and S1 on the right. As this procedure is limited to patients with low-back pain that is non-radicular, the request is not medically necessary.