

Case Number:	CM15-0211202		
Date Assigned:	10/30/2015	Date of Injury:	10/21/2007
Decision Date:	12/10/2015	UR Denial Date:	10/21/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	10/27/2015

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 48 year old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 10-21-07. The injured worker was diagnosed as having chronic neck pain, chronic thoracic pain and chronic low back pain. Subjective findings (5-11-15, 7-30-15, 8-27-15 and 9-24-15) indicated cervical, thoracic and lumbar spine pain. The injured worker rated his pain 5-7 out of 10. He reports about 90% improvement in pain with medications. Objective findings (7-30-15, 8-27-15 and 9-24-15) revealed a slightly antalgic gait favoring the left side, a positive Spurling's maneuver and tenderness to palpation over the C3-C6 facet capsules. As of the PR2 dated 10-13-15, the injured worker reports cervical, thoracic and lumbar spine pain. He rates his pain 6 out of 10. Objective findings include a slightly antalgic gait favoring the left side, a positive Spurling's maneuver and tenderness to palpation over the C3-C6 facet capsules. Current medications include Cymbalta, Gabapentin, MS Contin and Norco (since at least 3-18-15). Treatment to date has included a right sacroiliac joint injection on 10-20-15. The Utilization Review dated 10-21-15, modified the request for Norco 10-325mg #120 to Norco 10-325mg #105.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10/325mg #120: Upheld

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

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment 2009, Section(s): Opioids, criteria for use, Opioids, specific drug list. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) Pain / Opioids for chronic pain.

Decision rationale: According to the CA MTUS/Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines, opioids (criteria for use & specific drug list): A therapeutic trial of opioids should not be employed until the patient has failed a trial of non-opioid analgesics. The patient should have at least one physical and psychosocial assessment by the treating doctor (and a possible second opinion by a specialist) to assess whether a trial of opioids should occur. Before initiating therapy, the patient should set goals, and the continued use of opioids should be contingent on meeting these goals. Guidelines recommend 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. The 4 A's for Ongoing Monitoring include analgesia, activities of daily living, adverse side effects, and aberrant drug-taking behaviors. Opioids may be continued if the patient has returned to work and the patient has improved function/pain. The ODG-TWC pain section comments specifically on criteria for the use of drug screening for ongoing opioid treatment. The ODG Pain / Opioids for chronic pain states "According to a major NIH systematic review, there is insufficient evidence to support the effectiveness of long-term opioid therapy for improving chronic pain, but emerging data support a dose-dependent risk for serious harms." Based upon the records reviewed there is insufficient evidence to support chronic use of narcotics. There is lack of demonstrated functional improvement, demonstration of urine toxicology compliance, return to work, or increase in activity from the exam note of 10/13/15. Therefore the determination is not medically necessary.