

<b>Case Number:</b>	CM15-0213732		
<b>Date Assigned:</b>	11/03/2015	<b>Date of Injury:</b>	04/29/2010
<b>Decision Date:</b>	12/15/2015	<b>UR Denial Date:</b>	10/13/2015
<b>Priority:</b>	Standard	<b>Application Received:</b>	10/30/2015

### 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:

This 41 year old female sustained an industrial injury on 10-11-13. Documentation indicated that the injured worker was receiving treatment for lumbar herniated nucleus pulposus with bilateral lower extremity radiculopathy, cervical spine pain with bilateral upper extremity radicular symptoms and medication induced gastritis. Previous treatment included epidural steroid injections, trigger point injections and medications. In a Pr-2 dated 5-26-15, the injured worker complained of ongoing low back and neck pain rated 7 out of 10 on the visual analog scale. The injured worker reported having 50% improvement to neck pain and radicular symptoms following epidural steroid injection in March 2015. Physical exam was remarkable for cervical spine with tenderness to palpation, multiple taut bands and trigger points and range of motion: flexion, extension and bilateral lateral bend 30 degrees and bilateral rotation 60 degrees and lumbar spine with tenderness to palpation with taut bands and trigger points and range of motion: flexion 45 degrees, extension 15 degrees and bilateral lateral bend 20 degrees. The treatment plan included request lumbar epidural steroid injections and continuing medications (Anaprox, Prilosec, Ultracet and Norco). In PR-2's dated 6-23-15, 7-20-15 and 8-24-15 the injured worker complained of ongoing pain, rated 7 to 9 out of 10. In a PR-2 dated 9-28-15, the injured worker reported increased low back pain with radiation to both lower extremities and persistent neck pain. The injured worker was requesting another lumbar epidural steroid injection. The physician noted that the injured worker continued to have difficulty obtaining Norco through insurance. The injured worker was alternating Norco with Ultracet. Physical exam was unchanged. The treatment plan included scheduling a lumbar epidural steroid

injections and continuing medications (Anaprox, Prilosec, Ultracet and Norco). On 10-13-15, Utilization Review modified a request for Norco 10-325mg #30 to Norco 10-325mg #24.

### **IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES**

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

**Norco 10/325mg #30:** 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, 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, percentage of relief, demonstration of urine toxicology compliance, return to work, or increase in activity from the exam notes of 6-23-15, 7-20-15 and 8-24-15. Therefore the determination is not medically necessary.