

Case Number:	CM15-0215570		
Date Assigned:	11/05/2015	Date of Injury:	03/26/2015
Decision Date:	12/16/2015	UR Denial Date:	10/26/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	11/02/2015

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: North Carolina

Certification(s)/Specialty: Family Practice

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 51-year-old male sustained an industrial injury on 3-26-15. Documentation indicated that the injured worker was receiving treatment for lumbar facet arthropathy with radiculopathy and disc extrusions. Previous treatment included physical therapy, lumbar brace and medications. Electromyography and nerve conduction velocity test of bilateral lower extremities (5-26-15) showed L5 radiculopathy. Magnetic resonance imaging lumbar spine (4-10-15) showed disc extrusion and L4-5, chronic degenerative changes at L3-4, mild to moderate chronic degenerative neural foraminal narrowing at L3-4, L4-5 and L5-S1 with disc extrusion and annular fissuring at L2-3, L3-4, L4-5 and L5-S1. In an orthopedic report dated 10-15-15, the injured worker complained of ongoing shooting pains from his back into his left leg. A previous request for lumbar decompression with possible fusion had been denied. Physical exam was remarkable for lumbar spine with tenderness to palpation in the left lower lumbar region, range of motion: flexion 30 degrees and extension 10 degrees, positive left straight leg raise, 4+ out of 5 left lower extremity strength and decreased sensation in the left L5 distribution. The physician noted that previous magnetic resonance imaging was open with a small strength magnet. The treatment plan included epidural steroid injections at L4-5 and L5-S1 and repeat magnetic resonance imaging lumbar spine closed 1.5 Tesla. On 10-26-15, Utilization Review noncertified a request for interlaminar epidural steroid injections at L4-5 and L5-S1, repeat lumbar magnetic resonance imaging 1.5 Tesla.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Interlaminar Steroid Injections at L4-5/L5-S1: Upheld

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

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

Decision rationale: The California chronic pain medical treatment guidelines section on epidural steroid injections (ESI) states: Criteria for the use of Epidural steroid injections: 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. The patient has the documentation of back pain with radicular symptoms, however the request is for more than one intralaminar level which is not supported. Therefore, criteria have not been met and the request is not medically necessary.

MRI Lumbar 1.5 Telsa (repeat): Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: The Claims Administrator did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG); Work Loss Data Institute (20th annual edition), 2015, Low Back Chapter, repeat MRI's.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Low Back Complaints 2004, Section(s): Special Studies.

Decision rationale: The ACOEM chapter on low back complaints and special diagnostic studies states: Unequivocal objective findings that identify specific nerve compromise on the neurologic examination are sufficient evidence to warrant imaging in patients who do not respond to treatment and who would consider surgery an option. When the neurologic examination is less clear, however, further physiologic evidence of nerve dysfunction should be

obtained before ordering an imaging study. Indiscriminant imaging will result in false-positive findings, such as disk bulges, that are not the source of painful symptoms and do not warrant surgery. If physiologic evidence indicates tissue insult or nerve impairment, the practitioner can discuss with a consultant the selection of an imaging test to define a potential cause (magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] for neural or other soft tissue, computed tomography [CT] for bony structures). Relying solely on imaging studies to evaluate the source of low back and related symptoms carries a significant risk of diagnostic confusion (false positive test results) because of the possibility of identifying a finding that was present before symptoms began and therefore has no temporal association with the symptoms. Techniques vary in their abilities to define abnormalities (Table 12-7). Imaging studies should be reserved for cases in which surgery is considered or red-flag diagnoses are being evaluated. Because the overall false-positive rate is 30% for imaging studies in patients over age 30 who do not have symptoms, the risk of diagnostic confusion is great. There is no recorded presence of emerging red flags on the physical exam. There is evidence of nerve compromise on physical exam but there is not mention of consideration for surgery or complete failure of conservative therapy. For these reasons, criteria for imaging as defined above per the ACOEM have not been met. Therefore, the request is not medically necessary.