

<b>Case Number:</b>	CM15-0217093		
<b>Date Assigned:</b>	11/06/2015	<b>Date of Injury:</b>	07/30/2010
<b>Decision Date:</b>	12/18/2015	<b>UR Denial Date:</b>	10/19/2015
<b>Priority:</b>	Standard	<b>Application Received:</b>	11/04/2015

### 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 54-year-old female, with a reported date of injury of 07-30-2010. The diagnoses include lumbar disc disease, lumbar facet syndrome, and lumbar radiculopathy, and thoracic and lumbar spine sprain and strain with right lower extremity radiculitis. The progress report dated 09-30-2015 indicates that the injured worker had a good result with the previous transforaminal injection; therefore, another one was being requesting. The objective findings include tenderness to palpation of the bilateral paralumbar muscles with spasm, positive straight leg raise with right lower extremity, lumbar flexion at 46 degrees, and lumbar extension at 12 degrees. The injured worker's work status was noted as temporarily totally disabled for 6 weeks. On 08-26-2015, it was noted that the injured worker was able to move more after the epidural on 08-14-2015. The injured worker's pain level was not indicated. The diagnostic studies to date have included an MRI of the lumbar spine on 04-27-2015 which showed multilevel disc protrusion with abutment of the conus medullaris, descending right L2 nerve root, descending L5 nerve roots bilaterally and exiting right and left L4 nerve roots, and multilevel facet arthropathy. Treatments and evaluation to date have included fluoroscopically-guided cannulation of the right L3-4 and L4-5 epidural interspace on 08-14-2015, Tramadol, Prilosec, Lidoderm patch. The treating physician requested one right diagnostic transforaminal epidural steroid injection at the L3-4 and L4-5 levels. On 10-19-2015, Utilization Review (UR) non-certified the request for one right diagnostic transforaminal epidural steroid injection at the L3-4 and L4-5 levels.

### IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

**1 Right diagnostic transforaminal epidural steroid injection at the L3-L4 and L4-L5 levels:**  
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:** 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: "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. In this case the exam notes from 9/30/15 do not demonstrate a failure of conservative management nor a clear evidence of a dermatomal distribution of radiculopathy. Per CA MTUS guidelines "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." In this case, there is inadequate documentation of pain relief from the ESI from 8/14/15. Therefore, epidural steroid injection is not medically necessary and the determination is for non-certification.