

Case Number:	CM15-0222691		
Date Assigned:	11/18/2015	Date of Injury:	04/12/2002
Decision Date:	12/30/2015	UR Denial Date:	10/17/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	11/12/2015

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 58-year-old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 04-12-2002. A review of the medical records indicates that the injured worker (IW) is undergoing treatment for high blood pressure, diabetes, gastritis, lumbar herniated disc, lumbar stenosis, thoracic herniated disc, myelopathy, lumbar facet arthropathy, and back pain. Medical records (04-22-2015 to 10-02-2015) indicate ongoing radiating upper and low back pain. Pain levels were 9 out of 10 on a visual analog scale (VAS) without medication, and reduced to 4 out of 10 with gabapentin and 7- 8 out of 10 with MS Contin. Tramadol was reported to provide some relief. Records also indicate no changes in activity levels or level of functioning. Per the treating physician's progress report (PR), the IW was permanent and stationary. The physical exam, dated 10-02-2015, revealed an antalgic gait with use of a cane, tenderness to palpation over the cervical, thoracic and lumbar spines, decreased sensation in the left L5 & S1 dermatomes, positive straight leg raise on the left, and decreased motor strength in the left lower extremity. Relevant treatments have included: spinal cord stimulator, epidural steroid injections, medial branch blocks, acupuncture, physical therapy (PT), work restrictions, and medications (tramadol since at least 2014). The treating physician indicates that urine drug screenings and CURES reports have been consistent. The request for authorization (10-02-2015) shows that the following medication was requested: tramadol 50mg #120. The original utilization review (10-16-2015) partially approved the request for tramadol 50mg #120 that was modified to #48.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Tramadol 50mg quantity 120: 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 criteria for use.

Decision rationale: Per the CA MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines pages 93-94, opioids specific drug list, Tramadol is a synthetic opioid affecting the central nervous system. Tramadol is indicated for moderate to severe pain. Tramadol (Ultram) is a centrally acting synthetic opioid analgesic and it is not recommended as a first-line oral analgesic. Tramadol is considered a second line agent when first line agents such as NSAIDs fail. The guidelines advise against prescription to patients that at risk for suicide or addiction. A recent Cochrane review found that this drug decreased pain intensity, produced symptom relief and improved function for a time period of up to three months but the benefits were small (a 12% decrease in pain intensity from baseline). Adverse events often caused study participants to discontinue this medication, and could limit usefulness. There are no long-term studies to allow for recommendations for longer than three months. (Cepeda, 2006) Similar findings were found in an evaluation of a formulation that combines immediate-release vs. extended release Tramadol. Adverse effects included nausea, constipation, dizziness/vertigo and somnolence. (Burch, 2007) 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 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." ODG criteria (Pain / Opioids criteria for use) for continuing use of opioids include: "(a) If the patient has returned to work (b) If the patient has improved functioning and pain." In this case, there is insufficient evidence in the records of 10/2/15 of failure of primary over the counter non-steroids or moderate to severe pain to warrant Tramadol. 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, return to work, or increase in activity. Therefore, use of Tramadol is not medically necessary and it is noncertified.