

Case Number:	CM15-0031011		
Date Assigned:	02/24/2015	Date of Injury:	08/06/2005
Decision Date:	04/07/2015	UR Denial Date:	01/20/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	02/19/2015

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: New Jersey, Michigan, California
 Certification(s)/Specialty: Neurology, Neuromuscular Medicine

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 34 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on 08/06/2005. She has reported subsequent neck and back pain and was diagnosed with cervicalgia, pain in thoracic spine and myalgia/myositis. Treatment to date has included oral pain medication and medial branch blocks. In a progress note dated 11/04/2014, the injured worker complained of bilateral neck, shoulder and hand pain that was rated as 7/10. Objective findings were notable for mildly reduced range of motion of the cervical spine and pain with range of motion. The physician noted that the injured worker had a cervical radiofrequency ablation in the past which was successful. A request for authorization of medial branch block was made. On 01/20/2015, Utilization Review non-certified a request a medial branch block, noting that there was a lack of documentation to support the efficacy of treatment and that the intended levels were not specified. MTUS, ACOEM and ODG guidelines were cited.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

1 medial branch blocks: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 9 Shoulder Complaints Page(s): 173. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines

(ODG), Neck & Upper Back, Facet joint diagnostic blocks; Neck & Upper Back, Facet joint therapeutic steroid injections.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 8 Neck and Upper Back Complaints Page(s): 181.

Decision rationale: According to MTUS guidelines, "Invasive techniques (e.g., local injections and facet-joint injections of cortisone and lidocaine) are of questionable merit. Although epidural steroid injections may afford short-term improvement in leg pain and sensory deficits in patients with nerve root compression due to a herniated nucleus pulposus, this treatment offers no significant long term functional benefit, nor does it reduce the need for surgery. Despite the fact that proof is still lacking, many pain physicians believe that diagnostic and/or therapeutic injections may have benefit in patients presenting in the transitional phase between acute and chronic pain." According to ODG guidelines regarding facets injections, "Under study. Current evidence is conflicting as to this procedure and at this time no more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is suggested. If successful (pain relief of at least 50% for a duration of at least 6 weeks), the recommendation is to proceed to a medial branch diagnostic block and subsequent neurotomy (if the medial branch block is positive). If a therapeutic facet joint block is undertaken, it is suggested that it be used in consort with other evidence based conservative care (activity, exercise, etc.) to facilitate functional improvement. (Dreyfuss, 2003) (Colorado, 2001) (Manchikanti, 2003) (Boswell, 2005) See Segmental rigidity (diagnosis). In spite of the overwhelming lack of evidence for the long-term effectiveness of intra-articular steroid facet joint injections, this remains a popular treatment modality. Intra-articular facet joint injections have been popularly utilized as a therapeutic procedure, but are not currently recommended as a treatment modality in most evidence-based reviews as their benefit remains controversial." Furthermore and according to ODG guidelines, Criteria for use of therapeutic intra-articular and medial branch blocks are as follows: 1. No more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is recommended. 2. There should be no evidence of radicular pain, spinal stenosis, or previous fusion. 3. If successful (initial pain relief of 70%, plus pain relief of at least 50% for a duration of at least 6 weeks), the recommendation is to proceed to a medial branch diagnostic block and subsequent neurotomy (if the medial branch block is positive). 4. No more than 2 joint levels may be blocked at any one time. 5. There should be evidence of a formal plan of additional evidence-based activity and exercise in addition to facet joint injection. In this case, the patient did previously have medial branch blocks; however, there was no significant change in the cervical symptoms. There is no documentation that the lumbar facets are the main pain generator. In addition, the intended level(s) was not specified in the request. Therefore, the request for 1 medial branch block is not medically necessary.