

Case Number:	CM15-0032526		
Date Assigned:	02/26/2015	Date of Injury:	09/22/2008
Decision Date:	04/07/2015	UR Denial Date:	02/10/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	02/20/2015

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 73 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on 9/22/2008. The diagnoses have included displacement of lumbar intervertebral disc without myelopathy. Treatment to date has included surgical (L5-S1 anterior fusion 6/02/2010) and conservative measures. Currently, the injured worker complains of back pain, rated 8.5, and leg pain, rated 7. Physical exam was noted as unchanged. Current medication regime was not noted. Previous exam, 11/17/2014, noted slight spasms and guarding in the lumbar spine. Motor and sensory exams of the lower extremities were within normal limits. Magnetic resonance imaging of the lumbar spine, dated 12/29/2014, noted severe adhesive arachnoiditis. L2-3 slight retrolisthesis, diffuse disc bulge, and facet hypertrophy mildly narrow the left neural foramina. L3-4 3mm retrolisthesis, diffuse disc bulging of the annulus in combination with moderate facet hypertrophy, which moderately to severely narrows the canal, and disc bulge extending in to the neural foramina, with loss of disc height, and mild to moderately narrows the right and slightly narrows the left neural foramina. L4-5 noted 2mm anterolisthesis, disc bulge with left sided partial annular tear and moderate facet and ligamentum flavum hypertrophy, resulting in mild left lateral recess stenosis and mild left foraminal stenosis. L5-S1 showed solid anterior fusion. A pain management consult, dated 3/10/2015, noted a treatment plan that included bilateral L3-4 and L4-5 facet injection under fluoroscopy. On 2/10/2015, Utilization Review non-certified a request for facet blocks L2-3, L3-4, and L4-5, noting the lack of compliance with ACOEM Guidelines and Official Disability Guidelines.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Facet blocks L2-3, L3-4 and L4-5: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 300. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines, Low Back Chapter.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 309. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Facet joint intra-articular injections (therapeutic blocks) (http://worklossdatainstitute.verioiponly.com/odgtwc/low_back.htm#Facetjointinjections).))>.

Decision rationale: According 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". The ODG guidelines did not support facet injection for lumbar pain in this clinical context. In addition, there is no clear evidence or documentation that lumbar facets are main pain generator. The provider did not document formal plan of additional evidence-based activity and exercise in addition to facet joint injection. Therefore the request for Facet blocks L2-3, L3-4 and L4-5 is not medically necessary.

