MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM15-0033329		
Date Assigned:	02/26/2015	Date of Injury:	03/28/2011
Decision Date:	04/09/2015	UR Denial Date:	02/04/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	02/23/2015

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 59-year-old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 3/28/2011. The diagnoses have included myofascial pain syndrome and right lateral elbow epicondylitis. Treatment to date has included diagnostic imaging, cervical epidural injections, physical therapy, acupuncture and medications. He is status post left carpal tunnel release (11/09/2012) and right carpal tunnel release (7/12/2013). Currently, the IW complains of neck pain with radiation to the bilateral upper extremities, right worse, with numbness and tingling in the fingers. Objective findings included cervical spine limited range of motion secondary to increased pain, tightness and stiffness. There is tenderness to the occipital nerves bilaterally and over the thoracic spinous processes and interspaces from T3-8. There is tightness, tenderness and trigger points in the thoracic paravertebral musculature bilaterally. There is tenderness over the lumbar paraspinous processes and interspaces from L3-S1. On 2/04/2015, Utilization Review modified a request for Norco 10/325mg #60 noting that the clinical information submitted for review fails to meet the evidence-based guidelines for the requested service. The MTUS and ACOEM guidelines were cited. On 2/23/2015, the injured worker submitted an application for IMR for review of Norco 10/325mg #60.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10-325 q8h # 90 (MED 30): Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 3 Initial Approaches to Treatment Page(s): 115; 47-49,Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Criteria for use of opioids; Opioids for chronic pain; Opioids, dosing; Weaning of Medications Page(s): 78; 80-81, 82; 86-87; 124.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Criteria for use of opioids Page(s): 76-79.

Decision rationale: According to MTUS guidelines, Norco (Hydrocodone/Acetaminophen) is a synthetic opioid indicated for the pain management but not recommended as a first line oral analgesic. In addition and according to MTUS guidelines, ongoing use of opioids should follow specific rules: "(a) Prescriptions from a single practitioner taken as directed, and all prescriptions from a single pharmacy. (b) The lowest possible dose should be prescribed to improve pain and function. (c) Office: Ongoing review and documentation of pain relief, functional status, appropriate medication use, and side effects. Four domains have been proposed as most relevant for ongoing monitoring of chronic pain patients on opioids: pain relief, side effects, physical and psychosocial functioning, and the occurrence of any potentially aberrant (or non adherent) drug-related behaviors. These domains have been summarized as the "4 A's" (analgesia, activities of daily living, adverse side effects, and aberrant drug taking behaviors). The monitoring of these outcomes over time should affect therapeutic decisions and provide a framework." According to the patient file, there is no objective documentation of pain and functional improvement to justify continuous use of Norco. Norco was used for longtime without documentation of functional improvement or evidence of return to work or improvement of activity of daily living. Therefore, the prescription of Norco 10/325mg #90 is not medically necessary.