

Case Number:	CM15-0045910		
Date Assigned:	03/18/2015	Date of Injury:	12/06/2011
Decision Date:	04/23/2015	UR Denial Date:	02/26/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	03/11/2015

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: Maryland, Texas, Virginia

Certification(s)/Specialty: Internal Medicine, Allergy and Immunology, Rheumatology

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 29-year-old male with an industrial injury dated December 6, 2011. The injured worker diagnoses include lumbar or lumbosacral disc degeneration, lumbar disc displacement without myelopathy and thoracic or lumbosacral neuritis or radiculitis, not otherwise specified. Treatment consisted of diagnostic studies, prescribed medications, and periodic follow up visits. In a progress note dated 1/9/2015, the injured worker reported middle back pain, lower back pain and left elbow pain. Lumbar exam revealed restricted range of motion with pain, tenderness to palpitation on paravertebral muscles on right side and spinous process tenderness at L3, L4 and L5. The treating physician prescribed services for lumbar facet joint injection L3-4, L4-L5, L5-S1 right side now under review.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Lumbar facet joint injection L3-4, L4-L5, L5-S1 right side: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 287-315, Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Epidural Steroid Injections Page(s): 46. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) Low Back -

Lumbar & Thoracic (Acute & Chronic), Facet joint diagnostic blocks (injections) and Other Medical Treatment Guidelines MD Guidelines, Facet Joint Injections/Therapeutic Facet Joint Injections.

Decision rationale: ACOEM Guidelines state "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." MTUS is silent specifically with regards to facet injections, but does refer to epidural steroid injections. ODG and MD Guidelines agree that: "One diagnostic facet joint injection may be recommended for patients with chronic low back pain that is significantly exacerbated by extension and rotation or associated with lumbar rigidity and not alleviated with other conservative treatments (e.g., NSAIDs, aerobic exercise, other exercise, manipulation) in order to determine whether specific interventions targeting the facet joint are recommended. If after the initial block/blocks are given (see Diagnostic Phase above) and found to produce pain relief of at least 50-70% pain relief for at least 6-8 weeks, additional blocks may be supported." ODG details additional guidelines: Clinical presentation should be consistent with facet joint pain, signs & symptoms. 1. One set of diagnostic medial branch blocks is required with a response of 70%. The pain response should last at least 2 hours for Lidocaine. 2. Limited to patients with low-back pain that is non-radicular and at no more than two levels bilaterally. 3. There is documentation of failure of conservative treatment (including home exercise, PT and NSAIDs) prior to the procedure for at least 4-6 weeks. 4. No more than 2 facet joint levels are injected in one session (see above for medial branch block levels). 5. Recommended volume of no more than 0.5 cc of injectate is given to each joint. 6. No pain medication from home should be taken for at least 4 hours prior to the diagnostic block and for 4 to 6 hours afterward. 7. Opioids should not be given as a "sedative" during the procedure. 8. The use of IV sedation (including other agents such as midazolam) may be grounds to negate the results of a diagnostic block, and should only be given in cases of extreme anxiety. 9. The patient should document pain relief with an instrument such as a VAS scale, emphasizing the importance of recording the maximum pain relief and maximum duration of pain. The patient should also keep medication use and activity logs to support subjective reports of better pain control. 10. Diagnostic facet blocks should not be performed in patients in whom a surgical procedure is anticipated. (Resnick, 2005) 11. Diagnostic facet blocks should not be performed in patients who have had a previous fusion procedure at the planned injection level. Exclusion Criteria that would require UR physician review: Previous fusion at the targeted level. There is documentation of radicular symptoms which is against recommendations. The request is for 3 levels which is also against recommendations. Treatment notes did not detail other conservative treatment failures. As such, the request for Lumbar facet joint injections L3-4, L4-5, L5-S1 is not medically necessary.