

Case Number:	CM15-0058534		
Date Assigned:	04/03/2015	Date of Injury:	08/09/2013
Decision Date:	05/06/2015	UR Denial Date:	03/11/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	03/27/2015

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 43-year-old male who sustained an industrial injury on 8/9/13. The mechanism of injury is unclear. He currently complains of lumbar spine pain with radiation to the right lower extremity with numbness and tingling. His pain intensity is 7/10. He has difficulty engaging in activities of daily living. Medications are Norco, Flexaril and Motrin which are helpful with his pain. His urine drug screen was consistent with prescribed medications. Diagnoses include lumbar disc disease; lumbar radiculopathy; lumbar facet syndrome; right sacroiliac joint arthropathy. Treatments to date include right L3-4 and L4-5 transforaminal epidural injection (7/30/14) with 60% relief of pain for six weeks with reduction in radicular symptoms and 1/17/15 with 80% relief of pain but pain is returning; chiropractic therapy, physical therapy; medications; rest and home exercises. In the progress note dated 2/6/15 the treating provider's plan of care includes refilling Norco as medication help with pain relief and his urine drug screens have been appropriate and he will have another 2/6/15.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10/325 mg #90: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids Page(s): 76.

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.