

Case Number:	CM15-0059428		
Date Assigned:	04/06/2015	Date of Injury:	02/10/2015
Decision Date:	05/05/2015	UR Denial Date:	03/23/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	03/30/2015

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: California

Certification(s)/Specialty: Family Practice

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 42-year-old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 2/10/2015. He reported a fall off a ladder and injury to his left knee, shoulder, neck, and upper back. The injured worker was diagnosed as having internal left knee derangement, left arm contusion, left shoulder strain/sprain, and cervical strain/sprain. Treatment to date has included physical rehabilitation (4 visits to date 3/09/2015), diagnostics (magnetic resonance imaging left shoulder, left knee and neck and x-rays of the ribs and chest), knee splint, and medications. Currently, the injured worker complains of persistent pain over the chest, shoulder, knee, and neck/upper back. He reported that physical rehabilitation was helping with function and home exercise program. Current medications included Ibuprofen and Biofreeze. Current pain was rated 5-6/10 but were reported to increase rapidly with activity. The progress report did not include a cervical epidural steroid injection in the treatment plans submitted.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Cervical epidural steroid injection to left C7-T1: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Epidural Steroid Injections.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Epidural Steroid Injections Page(s): 46.

Decision rationale: The MTUS/Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines comment on the use of epidural steroid injections (ESIs) as a treatment modality. ESIs are recommended as an option for treatment of radicular pain (defined as pain in dermatomal distribution with corroborative findings of radiculopathy). See specific criteria for use below. Most current guidelines recommend no more than 2 ESI injections. This is in contradiction to previous generally cited recommendations for a "series of three" ESIs. These early recommendations were primarily based on anecdotal evidence. Research has now shown that, on average, less than two injections are required for a successful ESI outcome. Current recommendations suggest a second epidural injection if partial success is produced with the first injection, and a third ESI is rarely recommended. Epidural steroid injection can offer short term pain relief and use should be in conjunction with other rehab efforts, including continuing a home exercise program. There is little information on improved function. The American Academy of Neurology recently concluded that epidural steroid injections may lead to an improvement in radicular lumbosacral pain between 2 and 6 weeks following the injection, but they do not affect impairment of function or the need for surgery and do not provide long-term pain relief beyond 3 months, and there is insufficient evidence to make any recommendation for the use of epidural steroid injections to treat radicular cervical pain. Criteria for the use of Epidural steroid injections: Note: The purpose of ESI is to reduce pain and inflammation, restoring range of motion and thereby facilitating progress in more active treatment programs, and avoiding surgery, but this treatment alone offers no significant long-term functional benefit. 1) Radiculopathy must be documented by physical examination and corroborated by imaging studies and/or electrodiagnostic testing. 2) Initially unresponsive to conservative treatment (exercises, physical methods, NSAIDs and muscle relaxants). 3) Injections should be performed using fluoroscopy (live x-ray) for guidance. 4) If used for diagnostic purposes, a maximum of two injections should be performed. A second block is not recommended if there is inadequate response to the first block. Diagnostic blocks should be at an interval of at least one to two weeks between injections. 5) No more than two nerve root levels should be injected using transforaminal blocks. 6) No more than one interlaminar level should be injected at one session. 7) In the therapeutic phase, repeat blocks should be based on continued objective documented pain and functional improvement, including at least 50% pain relief with associated reduction of medication use for six to eight weeks, with a general recommendation of no more than 4 blocks per region per year. 8) Current research does not support a "series-of-three" injections in either the diagnostic or therapeutic phase. We recommend no more than 2 ESI injections. In this case, the medical records do not support the presence of radiculopathy as the source of the patient's neck pain. There is no description on the patient's history that suggests neuropathic pain. Further, there are no physical examination or radiographic findings consistent with radiculopathy. For this reason, a cervical epidural steroid injection to the C7-T1 area is not medically necessary.