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| Case Number: | CM15-0081280 | | |
| Date Assigned: | 05/04/2015 | Date of Injury: | 11/23/1994 |
| Decision Date: | 06/02/2015 | UR Denial Date: | 04/22/2015 |
| Priority: | Standard | Application Received: | 04/28/2015 |

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: North Carolina
 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 56 year old female with an industrial injury dated 11/23/1994. Diagnoses included thoracic spondylosis without myelopathy and insomnia. Prior treatment included thoracic rhizotomy, medications, home exercise program and epidural steroid injection. She presents for exacerbation of thoracic spine pain. She stated the pain was interfering with activities of daily living including sleeping, showering and cleaning. Objective findings included paraspinal muscle spasms, tenderness and decreased range of motion of thoracic 5-8. The provider documents the injured worker had greater than 50% relief for greater than 6 months with the previous thoracic rhizotomy on 12/12/2013. The treatment plan included bilateral thoracic facet intra-articular steroid injection of thoracic 5-6 and thoracic 6-7 (as injured worker declined rhizotomy) lab tests, continue medications and home exercise program.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Right Thoracic Facet Intra-Articular Steroid Injection, T5-T6, T6-T7 levels, as an outpatient: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 8 Neck and Upper Back Complaints, Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 165-194, 287-328, table 12-2.

MAXIMUS guideline: The Expert Reviewer did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation ODG, facet injections.

Decision rationale: The ACOEM states: 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. Per the ODG, facet joint injections are under study. Current evidence is conflicting as to this procedure and at this time no more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is suggested. Intra-articular facet joint injections have been popularly utilized as a therapeutic procedure, but are currently not recommended as a treatment modality in most evidence based reviews, as their benefit remains controversial. Criteria for use of diagnostic blocks for facet nerve pain: 1. One set of diagnostic medial branch blocks is required with a response of 70%. 2. Limited to non-radicular cervical pain and no more than 2 levels bilaterally. 3. Documentation of failure of conservative therapy. 4. No more than 2 joint levels are injected in 1 session. 5. Diagnostic facet blocks should be performed in patients whom a surgical procedure is anticipated. The requested service is not recommended per the ACOEM or the Official Disability Guidelines. The patient has radicular pain and therefore criteria have not all been met and the request is not certified.