

Case Number:	CM15-0081960		
Date Assigned:	05/04/2015	Date of Injury:	08/29/2014
Decision Date:	06/08/2015	UR Denial Date:	04/16/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	04/29/2015

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: Massachusetts

Certification(s)/Specialty: Anesthesiology, Pain Management

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 41 year old male, who sustained an industrial/work injury on 8/29/14. He reported initial complaints of back and neck pain. The injured worker was diagnosed as having low back pain, bilateral leg pain, and lumbosacral radiculopathy. Treatment to date has included topical and oral medication, activity modification, and diagnostics. MRI results were reported on 3/27/15. Currently, the injured worker complains of neck pain, low back pain, and bilateral leg pain. Per the primary physician's progress report (PR-2) on 4/1/15, the injured worker continued to have pain in the low back area with radiation of the pain down into both the legs posteriorly up to the knees. Radicular pain to the upper extremities was denied but has pain radiated from the neck to the mid back area. Examination revealed an antalgic gait, bilateral knee extension was 5-/5, positive straight leg raise bilaterally, paraspinal muscle spasm with tender areas over the bilateral lower lumbosacral facet joints. The requested treatments include left L4-L5 transforaminal epidural steroid injection, right L4-L5 transforaminal epidural steroid injection under fluoroscopic guidance.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Bilateral L4-L5 transforaminal epidural steroid injection under fluoroscopic guidance:
Overturned

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines ESI Page(s): 46.

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

Decision rationale: Accordingly to the MTUS, epidural steroid injections are recommended as an option for treatment of radicular pain (defined as pain in dermatome 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. (Armon, 2007) See also Epidural steroid injections, "series of three." 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 (Manchikanti, 2003), (CMS, 2004), and (Boswell, 2007). 8) Current research does not support a "series-of-three" injection in either the diagnostic or therapeutic phase. We recommend no more than 2 ESI injections. According to the documents available for review, the IW does have physical exam findings, pain complaints that are corroborated by imaging studies and as required by the MTUS above. Therefore, at this time, the requirements for treatment have been met and medical necessity has been established.