MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM15-0083742		
Date Assigned:	05/05/2015	Date of Injury:	05/02/1999
Decision Date:	06/04/2015	UR Denial Date:	04/28/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	04/30/2015

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: New Jersey, Alabama, 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 48 year old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 5/21/1999. He reported injury from cumulative trauma. The injured worker was diagnosed as having lumbar degenerative disc disease, sciatica, morbid obesity, a failed fusion and severe mechanical low back pain secondary to pseudo arthrosis at lumbar 4-5. Lumbar computed tomography scan showed no significant changes. Treatment to date has included lumbar laminectomy/discectomy /foraminotomy, repeat foraminotomy, multiple trigger point injections, hemi laminectomy and fusion, physical therapy psychiatric treatments and medication management. In a progress note dated 3/10/2015, the injured worker complains of chronic low back pain with burning and numbness in the left lower extremity and inability to lose weight. The progress report also documents a magnetic resonance imaging performed on 3/5/2015 with no significant interval changes. The treating physician is requesting magnetic resonance imaging of the lumbar spine without contrast.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

MRI of the LS (lumbar spine) without contrast: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 303. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG), Low Back Chapter, MRI.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 303.

Decision rationale: Regarding the indications for imaging in case of back pain, MTUS guidelines stated: "Lumbar spine x rays should not be recommended in patients with low back pain in the absence of red flags for serious spinal pathology, even if the pain has persisted for at least six weeks. However, it may be appropriate when the physician believes it would aid in patient management. Unequivocal objective findings that identify specific nerve compromise on the neurologic examination are sufficient evidence to warrant imaging in patients who do not respond to treatment and who would consider surgery an option. When the neurologic examination is less clear, however, further physiologic evidence of nerve dysfunction should be obtained before ordering an imaging study. Indiscriminant imaging will result in false-positive findings, such as disk bulges, that are not the source of painful symptoms and do not warrant surgery. If physiologic evidence indicates tissue insult or nerve impairment, the practitioner can discuss with a consultant the selection of an imaging test to define a potential cause (magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] for neural or other soft tissue, computer tomography [CT] for bony structures)." Furthermore, and according to MTUS guidelines, MRI is the test of choice for patients with prior back surgery, fracture or tumors that may require surgery. The patient does not have any clear evidence of new lumbar nerve root compromise. There is no clear evidence of significant change in the patient signs or symptoms suggestive of new pathology. The patient's progress report documented an MRI performed on March 5, 2015 with no significant interval changes. Therefore, the request for lumbar MRI W/O contrast is not medically necessary.