

Case Number:	CM14-0120097		
Date Assigned:	09/22/2014	Date of Injury:	01/28/2014
Decision Date:	10/23/2014	UR Denial Date:	07/24/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	07/30/2014

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. The expert reviewer is Board Certified in Neurology, has a subspecialty in Neuromuscular Medicine and is licensed to practice in New Jersey. 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/services. He/she is familiar with governing laws and regulations, including the strength of evidence hierarchy that applies to Independent Medical Review determinations.

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 patient is a 61-year-old woman who sustained a work related injury on January 28, 2014. Subsequently, she developed chronic low back pain. MRI of the lumbar spine dated April 23, 2014 showed moderate posterior osteophyte formation and disc protrusion at L4-5 with narrowing of the lateral recess bilaterally and neural foraminal narrowing on the right; neural foraminal narrowing at L5-S1. According to a medical evaluation report dated July 14, 2014, the patient complained of increased low back pain with any type of activity. She described constant dull/achy, stabbing pain in her low back with activity. On occasion, the pain radiated to her left anterior thigh. She reported a pain level at 4-5/10. Conservative care has included 24 sessions of physical therapy, which provided moderate relief. She has a home exercise and stretching program. Heat provides minimal relief. 10 sessions of chiropractic care provided moderate relief. Examination of the upper extremities was normal. Examination of the back and lower extremities revealed normal gait; heel and toe walking is normal; flexion 45 degrees, which reproduces pain over the bilateral facet joint areas at L4-5 and L5-S1; and extension 15 degrees. Tenderness with palpation and pain with oblique extension over bilateral L4-5 and L5-S1 facet joints. Negative straight leg raise. Quadriceps, dorsiflexion, and plantar flexion 5/5 bilaterally. Reflexes: patella 2+ bilaterally, Achilles 1+ bilaterally. Sensation intact. The patient was diagnosed with bilateral low back pain, possible facet syndrome. The provider requested authorization for Medial branch block bilateral L3-5.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Bilateral lumbar medial branch block, L3, L4, 5: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 300. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation ODG-TWC Low Back Procedure Summary last 07/03/2014; Criteria for the use of diagnostic blocks for facet "mediated" pain

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 309.

Decision rationale: According MTUS guidelines, <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>. According to ODG guidelines regarding facets injections, < Under study. Current evidence is conflicting as to this procedure and at this time no more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is suggested. If successful (pain relief of at least 50% for a duration of at least 6 weeks), the recommendation is to proceed to a medial branch diagnostic block and subsequent neurotomy (if the medial branch block is positive). If a therapeutic facet joint block is undertaken, it is suggested that it be used in consort with other evidence based conservative care (activity, exercise, etc.) to facilitate functional improvement. (Dreyfuss, 2003) (Colorado, 2001) (Manchikanti , 2003) (Boswell, 2005) See Segmental rigidity (diagnosis). In spite of the overwhelming lack of evidence for the long-term effectiveness of intra-articular steroid facet joint injections, this remains a popular treatment modality. Intra-articular facet joint injections have been popularly utilized as a therapeutic procedure, but are not currently recommended as a treatment modality in most evidence-based reviews as their benefit remains controversial.> Furthermore and according to ODG guidelines, < Criteria for use of therapeutic intra-articular and medial branch blocks, are as follows:1. No more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is recommended. 2. There should be no evidence of radicular pain, spinal stenosis, or previous fusion.3. If successful (initial pain relief of 70%, plus pain relief of at least 50% for a duration of at least 6 weeks), the recommendation is to proceed to a medial branch diagnostic block and subsequent neurotomy (if the medial branch block is positive). 4. No more than 2 joint levels may be blocked at any one time.5. There should be evidence of a formal plan of additional evidence-based activity and exercise in addition to facet joint injection. The ODG guidelines did not support medial branch block in this clinical context. There is no clear evidence or documentation that lumbar and sacral facets are main pain generator. Furthermore, ODG guidelines do not recommend more than 2 joint levels to be blocked at one time. Therefore, the Medial branch block bilateral L3-5 is not medically necessary.