MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM14-0120352		
Date Assigned:	08/06/2014	Date of Injury:	08/11/2008
Decision Date:	10/30/2014	UR Denial Date:	07/17/2014
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 Occupaitonal Medicine and is licensed to practice in California. 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 applicant is a represented [redacted] employee who has filed a claim for chronic low back pain reportedly associated with an industrial injury of August 11, 2008. Thus far, the applicant has been treated with the following: Analgesic medications; opioid therapy; a TENS unit; adjuvant medications; epidural steroid injection therapy; and extensive periods of time off of work. In a Utilization Review Report dated July 17, 2014, the claims administrator failed to approve a request for Norco, a short-acting opioid. The applicant's attorney subsequently appealed. In a September 17, 2014 progress note, the applicant was described as not working. The applicant was receiving [redacted] benefits along with Workers' Compensation indemnity benefits, the attending provider acknowledged. The applicant was using Norco for pain relief. The attending provider posited that the applicant's pain was highly variable and ranged from 6-7/10 without medications versus 2-3/10 with Norco. The attending provider acknowledged that the applicant was having difficulty standing and/or walking further than one block. The applicant had last worked some six years prior. The applicant's wife was helping him perform activities of daily living as basic as showering and dressing. The applicant was significantly depressed. His wife was doing most of his chores, although the applicant was able to make breakfast, it was acknowledged. Norco, a TENS unit, epidural injection, and MRI imaging of the lumbar spine were sought while the applicant was kept off of work.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10/325mg #120: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids, Criteria for use; Opioids, Specific drug list; On-Going M.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines When to Continue Opioids topic. Page(s): 80.

Decision rationale: As noted on page 80 of the MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines, the cardinal criteria for continuation of opioid therapy include evidence of successful return to work, improved functioning, and/or reduced pain achieved as a result of the same. In this case, however, the applicant is off of work. The applicant last worked some six years prior. While the attending provider has reported some reduction in pain scores achieved as a result of ongoing medication usage, including ongoing Norco usage, this is, however, outweighed by the applicant's failure to return to work and the applicant's continued difficulty performing activities of daily living as basic as household chores, dressing himself, standing, walking, etc. All of the above, taken together, does not make a compelling case for continuation of Norco. Therefore, the request is not medically necessary.