

Case Number:	CM14-0023417		
Date Assigned:	05/12/2014	Date of Injury:	04/05/2012
Decision Date:	12/18/2014	UR Denial Date:	01/30/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	02/24/2014

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 [REDACTED] is a 61-year-old woman who sustained a work related injury on April 5, 2012. Subsequently, she developed chronic back pain. The patient underwent facet joint inspiration and injection L4-5, L5-S1 left. According to a progress report dated October 28, 2014, the patient complained of back pain radiating down the left leg. She rated her pain at 4/10 with medications and 7/10 without medications. She noted that the flector patch has been very helpful to reduce pain and inflammation. Inspection of the lumbar spine revealed loss of normal lordosis with straightening of the lumbar spine. Range of motion was restricted with flexion limited to 45 degrees, extension limited to 15 degrees and all range of motion with extreme pain. on palpation, paravertebral muscles, hypertonicity, spasm, and tenderness was noted on the left side. Spinous process tenderness was noted on L4 and L5. Patient was not able to walk on heel or toes. Lumbar facet loading was positive on the left side. Straight leg raising test was negative. Babinski's sign was negative. Significant left lumbar facet loading. Dysesthesias with palpation to the left lumbar region. Tenderness noted over the sacroiliac spine. Patient moved all extremities well. The patient was diagnosed with lumbar radiculopathy, low back pain, and lumbar facet syndrome. The provider requested authorization for Lumbar Facet Joint Injection to Left L4-L5 and L5-S1.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

LUMBAR FACET JOINT INJECTION TO LEFT L4-L5 AND L5-S1: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 308-310.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 309. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) < Facet joint intra-articular injections (therapeutic blocks) (http://worklossdatainstitute.verioiponly.com/odgtwc/low_back.htm#Facetjointinjections).)>

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." There is no documentation that the lumbar facets are the main pain generator in this case. The diagnosis of radiculopathy was not excluded in this case. There is no clear documentation of failure of conservative therapies. Therefore, the request for Lumbar Facet Joint Injection to Left L4-L5 and L5-S1 is not medically necessary.