

<b>Case Number:</b>	CM14-0210836		
<b>Date Assigned:</b>	12/23/2014	<b>Date of Injury:</b>	12/24/2011
<b>Decision Date:</b>	02/19/2015	<b>UR Denial Date:</b>	12/03/2014
<b>Priority:</b>	Standard	<b>Application Received:</b>	12/16/2014

### 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. 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: North Carolina

Certification(s)/Specialty: Family Practice

### 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 54-year-old with a reported date of injury of 12/24/2011. The patient has the diagnoses of lumbar facet arthropathy, polyneuropathy, gait instability, lumbar discogenic pain, lumbar degenerative disc disease, lumbar radiculopathy, sacrum disorder, coccydynia and abnormal posture. Per the most recent progress reports provided for review from the primary treating physician dated 10/21/2014, the patient had complaints of low back pain. Previous treatment modalities have included lumbar nerve blocks. The physical exam noted limited lumbar range of motion, tenderness along the lumbar spine with spasm, positive bilateral facet loading tests, sacrum tenderness, SI joint tenderness and lower extremity weakness with decreased reflex response. Treatment plan recommendations included continuation of medications, request for lumbar facet nerve radiofrequency ablation, EMG/NCV of the lower extremities and home exercise programs.

### IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

**Norco 10-325mg tablet #150:** Upheld

**Claims Administrator guideline:** Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Page(s): 91, 78-80 and 124.

**MAXIMUS guideline:** Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines opioids  
Page(s): 76-84.

**Decision rationale:** The California chronic pain medical treatment guidelines section on opioids states: On-Going Management. Actions Should Include: (a) Prescriptions from a single practitioner taken as directed, and all prescriptions from a single pharmacy. (b) The lowest possible dose should be prescribed to improve pain and function. (c) Office: Ongoing review and documentation of pain relief, functional status, appropriate medication use, and side effects. Pain assessment should include: current pain; the least reported pain over the period since last assessment; average pain; intensity of pain after taking the opioid; how long it takes for pain relief; and how long pain relief lasts. Satisfactory response to treatment may be indicated by the patient's decreased pain, increased level of function, or improved quality of life. Information from family members or other caregivers should be considered in determining the patient's response to treatment. The 4 A's for Ongoing Monitoring: Four domains have been proposed as most relevant for ongoing monitoring of chronic pain patients on opioids: pain relief, side effects, physical and psychosocial functioning, and the occurrence of any potentially aberrant (or non-adherent) drug-related behaviors. These domains have been summarized as the "4 A's" (analgesia, activities of daily living, adverse side effects, and aberrant drug taking behaviors). The monitoring of these outcomes over time should affect therapeutic decisions and provide a framework for documentation of the clinical use of these controlled drugs assessment; the patient should be requested to keep a pain diary that includes entries such as pain triggers, and incidence of end-of-dose pain. It should be emphasized that using this diary will help in tailoring the opioid dose. This should not be a requirement for pain management. (e) Use of drug screening or inpatient treatment with issues of abuse, addiction, or poor pain control. (f) Documentation of misuse of medications (doctor-shopping, uncontrolled drug escalation, drug diversion). (g) Continuing review of overall situation with regard to nonopioid means of pain control. (h) Consideration of a consultation with a multidisciplinary pain clinic if doses of opioids are required beyond what is usually required for the condition or pain does not improve on opioids in 3 months. Consider a psych consult if there is evidence of depression, anxiety or irritability. Consider an addiction medicine consult if there is evidence of substance misuse. When to Continue Opioids (a) If the patient has returned to work (b) If the patient has improved functioning and pain. Chronic back pain: Appears to be efficacious but limited for short-term pain relief, and long term efficacy is unclear (>16 weeks), but also appears limited. Failure to respond to a time limited course of opioids has led to the suggestion of reassessment and consideration of alternative therapy. There is no evidence to recommend one opioid over another. In patients taking opioids for back pain, the prevalence of lifetime substance use disorders has ranged from 36% to 56% (a statistic limited by poor study design). Limited information indicated that up to one-fourth of patients who receive opioids exhibit aberrant medication-taking behavior. There are three studies comparing Tramadol to placebo that have reported pain relief, but this increase did not necessarily improve function. The long-term use of this medication is not recommended unless certain objective outcome measures have been met as defined above. There is no provided objective outcome measure that shows significant improvement in function. The most recent progress notes do not mention work status. There is a noted improvement in VAS scores from 7 to 5/10 with medications. For these reasons all criteria for ongoing and continued use of the medication have not been met. Therefore the request is not medically necessary.

