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| Case Number: | CM15-0000902 | | |
| Date Assigned: | 01/12/2015 | Date of Injury: | 07/03/1999 |
| Decision Date: | 03/06/2015 | UR Denial Date: | 12/15/2014 |
| Priority: | Standard | Application Received: | 01/05/2015 |

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, Michigan, 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 60 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on 7/03/1999. The mechanism of injury was not noted. The diagnoses have included postlaminectomy syndrome, lumbar region, and herniated lumbar disc. Treatment to date has included surgery, physical therapy, trigger point injections, medications, and acupuncture. Specific dates or results from prior treatments were not noted. The progress note dated 12/04/2014 was reviewed. Currently, the injured worker complains of pain to the neck, upper and lower back, leg, knee, and ankle. The severity of pain without medications was rated 8/10. The injured worker was previously given Pamelor and Gabapentin, per progress note dated 10/30/2014, but had not started the medications yet. Tenderness to palpation was documented over the left thoracic paraspinal, bilateral lower lumbar facet joints, and bilateral S1 joints. On 12/15/2014, Utilization Review non-certified a lumbar (lower back) medial branch block #1 at L1-S2 (side unspecified), as an outpatient, noting the lack of compliance with Official Disability Guidelines.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

1 Lumbar (lower back) Medial Branch Block at L1-S2- as an outpatient: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: The Claims Administrator did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) 18th edition (web), Low Back- Facet joint Diagnostic Blocks

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. In this case, there is no documentation of facet mediated pain; there is no clear evidence or documentation that lumbar and sacral facets are main pain generator. According to the progress report dated December 24, 2014, the patient's diagnoses included lumbar radiculopathy.