

Case Number:	CM15-0007706		
Date Assigned:	01/26/2015	Date of Injury:	11/03/2013
Decision Date:	03/17/2015	UR Denial Date:	12/18/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	01/13/2015

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 55 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on 11/03/2013 when she was changing linen and felt a pull to the right lower back. The diagnoses have included dorsolumbar sprain/strain, rule out herniated nucleus pulposus and possible radiculopathy to left lower extremity. Treatment to date has included modified work, back support, cold/hot packs, heat pads, medications, epidural steroid injection (ESI), physical therapy, chiropractic and acupuncture. Currently, the IW complains of constant pain of the lumbar spine rated as a 5/10 with radiation to the bilateral lower extremities left greater than right with associated weakness. Objective findings included tenderness and decreased range of motion with paraspinal spasm. On 12/18/2014, Utilization Review non-certified a request for physical therapy for the lumbar spine (2x6) noting the lack of documented objective clinical improvement with prior physical therapy. The ACOEM Guidelines were cited. On 1/13/2015, the injured worker submitted an application for IMR for review of physical therapy of the lumbar spine.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Physical therapy lumbar: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Physical Medicine Page(s): 98.

Decision rationale: According to MTUS guidelines, Physical Medicine is "Recommended as indicated below. Passive therapy (those treatment modalities that do not require energy expenditure on the part of the patient) can provide short term relief during the early phases of pain treatment and are directed at controlling symptoms such as pain, inflammation and swelling and to improve the rate of healing soft tissue injuries. They can be used sparingly with active therapies to help control swelling, pain and inflammation during the rehabilitation process. Active therapy is based on the philosophy that therapeutic exercise and/or activity are beneficial for restoring flexibility, strength, endurance, function, range of motion, and can alleviate discomfort. Active therapy requires an internal effort by the individual to complete a specific exercise or task. This form of therapy may require supervision from a therapist or medical provider such as verbal, visual and/or tactile instruction(s). Patients are instructed and expected to continue active therapies at home as an extension of the treatment process in order to maintain improvement levels. Home exercise can include exercise with or without mechanical assistance or resistance and functional activities with assistive devices.(Colorado, 2002) (Airaksinen, 2006) Patient-specific hand therapy is very important in reducing swelling, decreasing pain, and improving range of motion in CRPS. (Li, 2005) The use of active treatment modalities (e.g., exercise, education, activity modification) instead of passive treatments is associated with substantially better clinical outcomes. In a large case series of patients with low back pain treated by physical therapists, those adhering to guidelines for active rather than passive treatments incurred fewer treatment visits, cost less, and had less pain and less disability. The overall success rates were 64.7% among those adhering to the active treatment recommendations versus 36.5% for passive treatment. (Fritz, 2007)."Based on the medical records presented for review, the patient has had at least 14 physical therapy sessions, yet there is no documentation of the efficacy and objective clinical improvement with these previous sessions. In addition, there is no documentation of objective findings that the patient condition needed physical therapy and not home exercise. Therefore, physical therapy lumbar is not medically necessary.