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| Case Number: | CM15-0018552 | | |
| Date Assigned: | 02/06/2015 | Date of Injury: | 04/16/2003 |
| Decision Date: | 04/14/2015 | UR Denial Date: | 01/20/2015 |
| Priority: | Standard | Application Received: | 01/30/2015 |

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: Maryland, Texas, Virginia

Certification(s)/Specialty: Internal Medicine, Allergy and Immunology, Rheumatology

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 69-year-old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 4/16/2003. The current diagnoses are pseudoarthrosis C6-C7, chronic narcotic tolerance, post-operative left cervical radiculopathy, status post C6-C7 posterior spinal instrumentation and fusion (11/19/2014), status post C6-C7 anterior discectomy and fusion (12/12/12), and status post C3 through C6 anterior discectomy and fusion (11/18/2008). Currently, the injured worker complains of neck pain, 10/10 on a subjective pain scale. Current medications are Norco and Sonata. Treatment to date has included medications and multiple cervical surgeries. The treating physician is requesting Norco 10/325mg #240, which is now under review. On 1/20/2015, Utilization Review had non-certified a request for Norco 10/325mg #240. The Norco was modified to #80 to allow for continued reduction and discontinuation. The California MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines were cited.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10/325mg #240: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Page(s): 9, 74, 78-97.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids Page(s): 74-96. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) Neck and Upper Back (Acute and Chronic), Low Back - Lumbar & Thoracic (Acute & Chronic), Opioids, Pain.

Decision rationale: ODG does not recommend the use of opioids for neck and low back pain "except for short use for severe cases, not to exceed 2 weeks." The patient has exceeded the 2 week recommended treatment length for opioid usage. MTUS does not discourage use of opioids past 2 weeks, but does state that "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." The treating physician does not fully document the least reported pain over the period since last assessment, intensity of pain after taking opioid, pain relief, increased level of function, or improved quality of life. The previous UR modified to allow for a wean which is appropriate. As such, the question for Norco 10/325mg # 240 is not medically necessary.