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| Case Number: | CM15-0113653 | | |
| Date Assigned: | 06/22/2015 | Date of Injury: | 10/11/2005 |
| Decision Date: | 07/21/2015 | UR Denial Date: | 06/04/2015 |
| Priority: | Standard | Application Received: | 06/12/2015 |

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: California

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 injured worker is a 38 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on 10/11/2005. Diagnoses include low back pain, lumbar degenerative disc disease, lumbar radiculitis, muscle pain, chronic pain syndrome, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and insomnia. Treatment to date has included medications including Tylenol #3, Vicodin, Soma and currently Norco, Gabapentin, Opana, Ambien, Ibuprofen, Prilosec and Flexeril. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the lumbar spine dated 3/15/2013 showed stable findings at L5-S1 similar to previous MRIs. There is no entrapment or compression on the L5 nerves in the neural foramen currently. Per the Primary Treating Physician's Progress Report dated 5/22/2015, the injured worker reported pain that is described as "worse." She continues to have numbness of her legs from her knees to her feet. She reports a sense of weakness with forward flexion and rates her pain as 7-8/10 without pain medications and 4-5/10 with pain medications. Physical examination of the lumbar spine revealed 5-/5 bilateral lower extremity strength, reduced sensation of the right L4 L5 and S1 dermatome, +1/4 reflexes patella bilaterally and +1/4 reflexes Achilles. There was significant tenderness over the bilateral L4-5 and L5-S1 paraspinals and increased pain upon flexion and extension. The plan of care included diagnostics and medications and authorization was requested for Norco 10/325mg #120.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10/325 MG #120: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids Page(s): 76-78, 80.

Decision rationale: The MTUS/Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines comment on the long-term use of opioids, including Norco. These guidelines have established criteria on the use of opioids for the ongoing management of pain. Actions should include: prescriptions from a single practitioner and from a single pharmacy. The lowest possible dose should be prescribed to improve pain and function. There should be an 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. There should be evidence of documentation of the "4 A's for Ongoing Monitoring." These four domains include: pain relief, side effects, physical and psychological functioning, and the occurrence of any potentially aberrant drug-related behaviors. Further, there should be 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 that does not improve on opioids in 3 months. There should be consideration of an addiction medicine consult if there is evidence of substance misuse (Pages 76-78). Finally, the guidelines indicate that for chronic pain, the long-term efficacy of opioids is unclear. Failure to respond to a time-limited course of opioids has led to the suggestion of reassessment and consideration of alternative therapy (Page 80). Based on the review of the medical records, there is insufficient documentation in support of these stated MTUS/Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines for the ongoing use of opioids. There is insufficient documentation of the "4 A's for Ongoing Monitoring." The treatment course of opioids in this patient has extended well beyond the timeframe required for a reassessment of therapy. In summary, there is insufficient documentation to support the chronic use of an opioid in this patient. Treatment with Norco is not considered as medically necessary.