

Case Number:	CM15-0113806		
Date Assigned:	06/23/2015	Date of Injury:	07/11/2014
Decision Date:	07/22/2015	UR Denial Date:	05/08/2015
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: New Jersey, Alabama, 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:

This is a 60 year old female with a July 11, 2014 date of injury. A progress note dated April 7, 2015 documents subjective complaints (persistent lower back pain; history of left leg pain that largely resolved with an epidural steroid injection), objective findings (tenderness to palpation of the bilateral lumbar paraspinous regions overlying the L4-L5 and L5-S1 facet arthropathy), and current diagnoses (L4-L5 spondylolisthesis; L5-S1 disc protrusion; left lumbar radicular pain, significantly improved with an epidural injection; facet arthropathy, L4-L5 and L5-S1 levels; lower back pain secondary to facet disease). Treatments to date have included lumbar epidural injection, magnetic resonance imaging of the lumbar spine that showed L5-S1 left foraminal disc protrusion along with L4-L5 spondylolisthesis and L4-L5 and L5-S1 facet arthropathy, medications, physical therapy, chiropractic treatments, and activity modifications. The treating physician documented a plan of care that included bilateral lumbar medial branch blocks, and a post procedure follow up visit.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Bilateral Lumbar Medial Branch Block at L3, L4, L5: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints.

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, 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 clear evidence that the patient failed conservative treatment including medication management and physical therapy. In addition, the diagnosis of radiculopathy or spinal stenosis was not fully excluded in this case. Therefore, the request for Bilateral Lumbar Medial Branch Block at L3, L4, L5 is not medically necessary.

Post procedure follow up visit: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 309.

Decision rationale: Since the primary procedure is not medically necessary, none of the associated services are medically necessary.