

<b>Case Number:</b>	CM15-0122751		
<b>Date Assigned:</b>	07/07/2015	<b>Date of Injury:</b>	08/22/2007
<b>Decision Date:</b>	07/31/2015	<b>UR Denial Date:</b>	06/19/2015
<b>Priority:</b>	Standard	<b>Application Received:</b>	06/25/2015

### 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: North Carolina

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 67 year old male who sustained an industrial injury on 08/22/2007. The injured worker was diagnosed with lumbar degenerative disc disease and lumbar facet mediated pain. The injured worker is status right L3 and L4 medial branch radiofrequency neurolysis, L5 dorsal ramus radiofrequency in January 2012, left L3, L4 medial branch radiofrequency neurolysis, left L5 dorsal ramus radiofrequency neurolysis in March 2012, bilateral L3, L4 medial branch block, L5 dorsal ramus block in July 2013, bilateral L3, L4 medial branch block, L5 dorsal ramus block in March 2014 and left L3, L4 medial branch radiofrequency neurolysis, left L5 dorsal ramus radiofrequency neurolysis in August 2014. Other treatments documented are diagnostic testing and opioids. According to the primary treating physician's progress report on May 14, 2015, the injured worker continues to experience stabbing low back pain rated at the office visit as up to 9-10/10. Examination demonstrated pain with extension beyond 20 degrees and pain on palpation at L4-L5 and L5-S1. Current medication is documented as Norco 10/325mg. Treatment plan consists of Norco and the current request for a bilateral lumbar L3, L4 medial branch block and a bilateral L5 dorsal ramus block.

### IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

**Bilateral Lumbar L3, L4 Medial Branch Block:** Upheld

**Claims Administrator guideline:** Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 300. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines: Low Back, Lumbar & Thoracic - Facet joint diagnostic blocks (injections).

**MAXIMUS guideline:** The Expert Reviewer did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation ODG, medial branch blocks.

**Decision rationale:** The ACOEM states: 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. Per the ODG, facet joint injections are under study. Current evidence is conflicting as to this procedure and at this time no more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is suggested. Intra-articular facet joint injections have been popularly utilized as a therapeutic procedure, but are currently not recommended as a treatment modality in most evidence based reviews as their benefit remains controversial. Criteria for use of diagnostic blocks for facet nerve pain: 1. One set of diagnostic medial branch blocks is required with a response of 70%. 2. Limited to non-radicular cervical pain and no more than 2 levels bilaterally. 3. Documentation of failure of conservative therapy. 4. No more than 2 joint levels are injected in 1 session. 5. Diagnostic facet blocks should be performed in patients whom a surgical procedure is anticipated. The requested service is not recommended per the ACOEM or the Official Disability Guidelines. Criteria have not been met in the provided clinical documentation such as failure of documented 70% reduction in pain from previous block and the request is not medically necessary.

**Bilateral Lumbar L5 Dorsal Ramus Block:** Upheld

**Claims Administrator guideline:** Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 300. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines: Low Back, Lumbar & Thoracic - Facet joint diagnostic blocks (injections).

**MAXIMUS guideline:** The Expert Reviewer did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation ODG, facet blocks.

**Decision rationale:** The ACOEM states: 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. Per the ODG, facet joint injections are under study. Current evidence is conflicting as to this procedure and at this time no more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is suggested. Intra-articular

facet joint injections have been popularly utilized as a therapeutic procedure, but are currently not recommended as a treatment modality in most evidence based reviews as their benefit remains controversial. Criteria for use of diagnostic blocks for facet nerve pain: 1. One set of diagnostic medial branch blocks is required with a response of 70%. 2. Limited to non-radicular cervical pain and no more than 2 levels bilaterally. 3. Documentation of failure of conservative therapy. 4. No more than 2 joint levels are injected in 1 session. 5. Diagnostic facet blocks should be performed in patients whom a surgical procedure is anticipated. The requested service is not recommended per the ACOEM or the Official Disability Guidelines. Criteria have not been met in the provided clinical documentation such as failure of documented 70% reduction in pain from previous block and the request is not medically necessary.