

Case Number:	CM15-0179152		
Date Assigned:	09/21/2015	Date of Injury:	11/21/2003
Decision Date:	10/23/2015	UR Denial Date:	08/13/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	09/11/2015

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 63 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on November 21, 2003. The injured worker was evaluated on June 29, 2015. She reported intermittent low back pain with occasional flare-up. She had residual pain on the right side. The evaluating physician noted that the injured worker's pain was unchanged. She rated her pain a 5 on a 10-point scale. On physical examination the injured worker had tenderness to palpation at the lumbar paravertebral muscles with spasm. Her neurovascular status was intact and a seated nerve root test was negative. She had limited lumbar spine range of motion with no clinical evidence of stability. The evaluating physician noted that the injured worker had low back pain with junctional level pathology. The treatment plan included MRI of the lumbar spine, EMG-NCV of the bilateral lower extremities, continued therapy and topical medication. Treatment to date has included L5-S1 posterior lumbar interbody fusion with removal of hardware on April 3, 2015. The injured worker was diagnosed as having status post L5-S1 posterior lumbar interbody fusion and status post removal of the symptomatic lumbar spinal hardware from L5 to S1 on April 3, 2015. A request for authorization for MRI of the lumbar spine was received on August 5, 2015. On September 11, 2015, the Utilization Review physician determined MRI of the lumbar spine was not medically necessary.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

MRI of the lumbar spine: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: The Claims Administrator did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines-Treatment in Workers' Compensation 2015.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Low Back Complaints 2004, Section(s): Special Studies.

Decision rationale: The ACOEM chapter on low back complaints and special diagnostic studies states: Unequivocal objective findings that identify specific nerve compromise on the neurologic examination are sufficient evidence to warrant imaging in patients who do not respond to treatment and who would consider surgery an option. When the neurologic examination is less clear, however, further physiologic evidence of nerve dysfunction should be obtained before ordering an imaging study. Indiscriminant imaging will result in false-positive findings, such as disk bulges, that are not the source of painful symptoms and do not warrant surgery. If physiologic evidence indicates tissue insult or nerve impairment, the practitioner can discuss with a consultant the selection of an imaging test to define a potential cause (magnetic resonance imaging [MRI] for neural or other soft tissue, computed tomography [CT] for bony structures). Relying solely on imaging studies to evaluate the source of low back and related symptoms carries a significant risk of diagnostic confusion (false positive test results) because of the possibility of identifying a finding that was present before symptoms began and therefore has no temporal association with the symptoms. Techniques vary in their abilities to define abnormalities (Table 12-7). Imaging studies should be reserved for cases in which surgery is considered or red-flag diagnoses are being evaluated. Because the overall false-positive rate is 30% for imaging studies in patients over age 30 who do not have symptoms, the risk of diagnostic confusion is great. There is no recorded presence of emerging red flags on the physical exam. There is evidence of nerve compromise on physical exam but there is not mention of consideration for surgery or complete failure of conservative therapy. For these reasons, criteria for imaging as defined above per the ACOEM have not been met. Therefore the request is not medically necessary.