

<b>Case Number:</b>	CM15-0179816		
<b>Date Assigned:</b>	09/21/2015	<b>Date of Injury:</b>	07/16/1999
<b>Decision Date:</b>	10/23/2015	<b>UR Denial Date:</b>	09/04/2015
<b>Priority:</b>	Standard	<b>Application Received:</b>	09/14/2015

### 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 56 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on 7-16-99. She reported right knee pain. The injured worker was diagnosed as having adjacent segment degenerative disease with L5-S1 radiculitis and chronic pain syndrome. Treatment to date has included placement of a spinal cord stimulator, facet injections at L5-S1, and medication. Physical examination findings on 7-8-15 included painful antalgic gait, negative straight leg raise, no major motor deficits, and tenderness at L5-S1. Previous facet blocks were noted to have provided pain relief for a few weeks. Currently, the injured worker complains of back pain with radiation to the legs and knee pain. The treating physician requested authorization for 2 right L5 nerve root blocks with right L5-S1 facet as an outpatient. On 9-4-15, the request was non-certified; the utilization review physician noted "there needs to be objectification of a verifiable radiculopathy on physical examination and none is noted."

### IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

**Two right L5 (lower back) nerve root block, with right L5-S1 facet too, as an outpatient:**  
Upheld

**Claims Administrator guideline:** Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment 2009.

**MAXIMUS guideline:** The Expert Reviewer did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (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 as the patient does have radicular pain symptoms and no facet tenderness at selected levels. Therefore, the request is not medically necessary.