

Case Number:	CM15-0022352		
Date Assigned:	02/11/2015	Date of Injury:	02/26/2014
Decision Date:	04/09/2015	UR Denial Date:	01/20/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	02/06/2015

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, District of Columbia, Maryland
 Certification(s)/Specialty: Anesthesiology, Pain Management

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 30-year-old male, who sustained an industrial injury on 2/26/2014. The current diagnoses are lumbar facet arthropathy and obesity. Currently, the injured worker complains of low back pain. The pain is rated 5/10 on a subjective pain scale. The pain is characterized as dull, sharp, burning, and throbbing. Treatment to date has included medications, work restrictions, TENS unit, and medial branch block (12/3/2014). The treating physician is requesting bilateral lumbar radiofrequency L3, L4 and L5, which is now under review. On 1/20/2015, Utilization Review had non-certified a request for bilateral lumbar radiofrequency L3, L4 and L5. The California MTUS ACOEM and Official Disability Guidelines were cited.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Bilateral Lumbar Radiofrequency L3, L4 and L5: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 301. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) Treatment Index, 11th edition (web), 2014, Low Back.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 300-301. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation ODG, Low Back, Facet Joint Radiofrequency Neurotomy.

Decision rationale: Per MTUS ACOEM, There is good quality medical literature demonstrating that radiofrequency neurotomy of facet joint nerves in the cervical spine provides good temporary relief of pain. Similar quality literature does not exist regarding the same procedure in the lumbar region. Per ODG with regard to facet joint radiofrequency neurotomy: "Under study. Conflicting evidence, which is primarily observational, is available as to the efficacy of this procedure and approval of treatment should be made on a case-by-case basis. Studies have not demonstrated improved function."The ODG indicates that criteria for facet joint radiofrequency neurotomy are as follows: (1) Treatment requires a diagnosis of facet joint pain using a medial branch block as described above. See Facet joint diagnostic blocks (injections). (2) While repeat neurotomies may be required, they should not occur at an interval of less than 6 months from the first procedure. A neurotomy should not be repeated unless duration of relief from the first procedure is documented for at least 12 weeks at 50% relief. The current literature does not support that the procedure is successful without sustained pain relief (generally of at least 6 months duration). No more than 3 procedures should be performed in a year's period. (3) Approval of repeat neurotomies depends on variables such as evidence of adequate diagnostic blocks, documented improvement in VAS score, decreased medications and documented improvement in function. (4) No more than two joint levels are to be performed at one time. (5) If different regions require neural blockade, these should be performed at intervals of no sooner than one week, and preferably 2 weeks for most blocks. (6) There should be evidence of a formal plan of additional evidence-based conservative care in addition to facet joint therapy. Per the guidelines cited above, no more than two joint levels are to be performed at one time. As the request is for three levels, medical necessity cannot be affirmed.