

Case Number:	CM15-0062444		
Date Assigned:	04/08/2015	Date of Injury:	01/07/2008
Decision Date:	05/08/2015	UR Denial Date:	02/27/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	04/02/2015

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

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:

This 79 year old male sustained an industrial injury to the low back on 1/7/08. Previous treatment included magnetic resonance imaging, lumbar spine surgery, physical therapy and medications. In a visit note dated 2/18/15, the injured worker complained of persistent low back pain rated 7/10 on the visual analog scale with radiation to the left leg associated with numbness. Physical exam was remarkable for lumbar spine with positive left straight leg raise and facet loading test and ¼ patellar jerk on the left. Current diagnoses included lumbar facet syndrome, lumbar spine radiculitis, lumbar stenosis and mononeuritis of leg. Current medications included Tramadol and Lidoderm patch. The injured worker received an epidural steroid injection at L4-5 during the office visit.

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.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 296-310. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) Low Back section, MRI.

Decision rationale: MTUS Guidelines for diagnostic considerations related to lower back pain or injury require that for MRI to be warranted there needs to be unequivocal objective clinical findings that identify specific nerve compromise on the neurological examination (such as sciatica) in situations where red flag diagnoses (cauda equina, infection, fracture, tumor, dissecting/ruptured aneurysm, etc.) are being considered, and only in those patients who would consider surgery as an option. In some situations where the patient has had prior surgery on the back, MRI may also be considered. The MTUS also states that if the straight-leg-raising test on examination is positive (if done correctly) it can be helpful at identifying irritation of lumbar nerve roots, but is subjective and can be confusing when the patient is having generalized pain that is increased by raising the leg. The Official Disability Guidelines (ODG) state that for uncomplicated low back pain with radiculopathy MRI is not recommended until after at least one month of conservative therapy and sooner if severe or progressive neurologic deficit is present. The ODG also states that repeat MRI should not be routinely recommended, and should only be reserved for significant changes in symptoms and/or findings suggestive of significant pathology. The worker in this case presented to the provider with continual lumbar pain with radiculopathy for a scheduled epidural injection. However, there was no evidence from subjective reports to suggest his symptoms were significantly worse in any specific way compared to past reports. Also, there was no ability to compare objective changes from prior as there were no old progress notes or previous MRI findings submitted for review. Within the progress notes submitted, however, there was no indication of any red flag diagnoses or reason to have another MRI study performed. Therefore, the MRI of the lumbar spine will be considered medically unnecessary based on the evidence presented for review.