

Case Number:	CM15-0069457		
Date Assigned:	04/17/2015	Date of Injury:	04/26/2005
Decision Date:	05/28/2015	UR Denial Date:	03/23/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	04/13/2015

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: Pennsylvania

Certification(s)/Specialty: Internal Medicine, Hospice & Palliative Medicine

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 49 year old male injured worker suffered an industrial injury on 04/26/2005. The diagnoses included low back pain with disc herniation and radiculitis, cervical sprain/strain with disc herniations, and depression. The diagnostics included lumbar magnetic resonance imaging. The injured worker had been treated with medications. On 3/10/2015 the treating provider reported constant neck and back pain rated as 9/10, with medications is 4/10, and without medications 10/10. He reported 50% improvement in function with activities of daily living with medications. On exam, the back has limited range of motion with muscle rigidity and muscle spasms. There was a limp with walking of the right lower leg. The neck is limited in range of motion with muscle spasms. The treatment plan included Norco.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10/325mg #120: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines opioids.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines Opioids, Weaning of Medications Page(s): 74-95, page 124.

Decision rationale: Norco (hydrocodone with acetaminophen) is a combination medication in the opioid and pain reliever classes. The MTUS Guidelines stress the lowest possible dose of opioid medications should be prescribed to improve pain and function, and monitoring of outcomes over time should affect treatment decisions. The Guidelines recommend that the total opioid daily dose should be lower than 120mg oral morphine equivalents. Documentation of pain assessments should include the current pain intensity, the lowest intensity of pain since the last assessment, the average pain intensity, pain intensity after taking the opioid medication, the amount of time it takes to achieve pain relief after taking the opioid medication, and the length of time the pain relief lasts. Acceptable results include improved function, decreased pain, and/or improved quality of life. The MTUS Guidelines recommend opioids be continued when the worker has returned to work and if the worker has improved function and pain control. When these criteria are not met, a slow individualized taper of medication is recommended to avoid withdrawal symptoms. The submitted documentation indicated the worker was experiencing lower back pain. The recorded pain assessments contained few of the elements suggested by the Guidelines. There was no discussion describing how often the medication was needed and used by the worker, exploring the potential negative side effects, or providing an individualized risk assessment. In the absence of such evidence, the current request for 120 tablets of Norco (hydrocodone with acetaminophen) 10/325mg is not medically necessary. Because the potentially serious risks outweigh the benefits in this situation based on the submitted documentation, an individualized taper should be able to be completed with the medication the worker has available.