MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM15-0094266		
Date Assigned:	05/20/2015	Date of Injury:	08/15/2009
Decision Date:	08/11/2015	UR Denial Date:	05/15/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	05/15/2015

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, Alabama, California
Certification(s)/Specialty: Neurology, Neuromuscular 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 injured worker was a 61 year old male, who sustained an industrial injury, August 15, 2009. The injury was sustained when a customer was leaving the store stealing a case of beer. The customer ran into the injured worker and tries to hold on to keep himself from falling and hit the upper back on a wheelchair. The injured worker previously received the following treatments bilateral knee x-rays, bilateral total knee arthroplasty, random toxicology laboratory studies were negative for any unexpected findings, right elbow surgery, Oxycontin, Percocet, Docusate, Omeprazole, Gabapentin, Voltaren Gel, Zolpidem, physical therapy, home exercise program and physical therapy with good pain relief. The injured worker was diagnosed with chronic pain, lumbar radiculopathy, and lumbar stenosis, osteoarthritis localized in the lower leg, elbow/ forearm sprain/strain and chondromalacia of patella. According to progress note of January 12, 2015, the injured worker's chief complaint was lower back, neck, thoracic, bilateral knee, bilateral leg and bilateral elbow pain. The low back pain radiated into both lower extremities to the feet. The bilateral elbow and knee pain was constant with numbness. The right upper extremity was in a hard cast and had severely decreased range of motion. The pain was rated at 10 out of 10 without medications and 4 out of 10 with pain with pain medication. The physical exam noted well healed surgical scar of the right elbow. The right elbow improved range of motion. There was mild pain in the right elbow with flexion and extension. The treatment plan included injection of the paravertebral facet joint of the lumbar spine at L3-L4, L4-L5 and L5-S1 medial branch block.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

L3-4, L4-5, and L5-S1 medial branch block: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: The Claims Administrator did not base their decision on the MTUS. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Official Disability Guidelines, Low Back.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 12 Low Back Complaints Page(s): 309.

Decision rationale: According MTUS guidelines, 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. According to ODG guidelines regarding facets injections, under study. Current evidence is conflicting as to this procedure and at this time no more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is suggested. If successful (pain relief of at least 50% for a duration of at least 6 weeks), the recommendation is to proceed to a medial branch diagnostic block and subsequent neurotomy (if the medial branch block is positive). If a therapeutic facet joint block is undertaken, it is suggested that it be used in consort with other evidence based conservative care (activity, exercise, etc.) to facilitate functional improvement. (Dreyfuss, 2003) (Colorado, 2001) (Manchikanti, 2003) (Boswell, 2005) See Segmental rigidity (diagnosis). In spite of the overwhelming lack of evidence for the long-term effectiveness of intra-articular steroid facet joint injections, this remains a popular treatment modality. Intra-articular facet joint injections have been popularly utilized as a therapeutic procedure, but are not currently recommended as a treatment modality in most evidence-based reviews as their benefit remains controversial. Furthermore and according to ODG guidelines, criteria for use of therapeutic intra-articular and medial branch blocks, are as follows: 1. No more than one therapeutic intra-articular block is recommended. 2. There should be no evidence of radicular pain, spinal stenosis, or previous fusion. 3. If successful (initial pain relief of 70%, plus pain relief of at least 50% for a duration of at least 6 weeks), the recommendation is to proceed to a medial branch diagnostic block and subsequent neurotomy (if the medial branch block is positive). 4. No more than 2 joint levels may be blocked at any one time. 5. There should be evidence of a formal plan of additional evidence-based activity and exercise in addition to facet joint injection. The ODG guidelines do not support more than 2 levels to be injected per visit. There is no documentation of failure of conservative therapies in this patient. Therefore, the request for L3-4, L4-5, and L5-S1 medial branch block is not medically necessary.