MAXIMUS Federal Services

Case Number:	CM15-0096772		
Date Assigned:	05/27/2015	Date of Injury:	03/05/2001
Decision Date:	07/01/2015	UR Denial Date:	05/07/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	05/19/2015

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: Texas, New York, California
Certification(s)/Specialty: Preventive Medicine, Occupational 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 applicant is a represented 54-year-old who has filed a claim for chronic low back pain (LBP) reportedly associated with an industrial injury of March 5, 2001. In a Utilization Review report dated May 7, 2015, the claims administrator failed to approve a request for Norco. The claims administrator referenced a RFA form dated April 30, 2015 and an associated progress note of April 21, 2015 in its determination. The applicant's attorney subsequently appealed. In a RFA form dated March 7, 2015, acupuncture and Norco were endorsed. In an associated progress note dated March 9, 2015, the applicant reported highly variable 5-9/10 pain complaints. The attending provider stated that Norco was ameliorating the applicant's ability to stretch 5 minutes a day and walk 10 minutes a day. Norco was renewed while acupuncture was sought. The applicant was also asked to obtain six previously approved sessions of physical therapy. The applicant's work status was not clearly stated, although the treating provider stated that the applicant was on "future medical benefits," suggesting that the applicant was not, in fact, working.

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, specific drug list: Hydrocodone/Acetaminophen; Criteria for use of Opioids: On-Going Management; Weaning of Medications Page(s): 91, 78-80, 124.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS Chronic Pain Treatment Guidelines 7) When to Continue Opioids Page(s): 80.

Decision rationale: No, the request for Norco, a short-acting opioid, was not medically necessary, medically appropriate, or indicated here. As noted on page 80 of the MTUS Chronic Pain Medical Treatment Guidelines, the cardinal criteria for continuation of opioid therapy include evidence of successful return to work, improved functioning, and/or reduced pain achieved as a result of the same. Here, however, the applicant was seemingly off work, it was suggested (but not clearly stated) on progress note dated March 9, 2015. While the attending provider did recount some reported reduction in pain scores from 7-9/10 without medications to 5/10 with medications, these reports were, however, outweighed by the applicant's seeming failure to return to work and the attending provider's failure to outline meaningful or material improvements in function (if any) effected as a result of four times daily usage of Norco. The attending provider's commentary to the effect that the applicant's ability to walk 10 minutes a day and/or perform stretching exercises 5 minutes a day as a result of ongoing medication consumption did not constitute evidence of a meaningful, material, or substantive improvement in function effected as a result of ongoing Norco usage. Therefore, the request was not medically necessary.