

Case Number:	CM15-0098437		
Date Assigned:	05/29/2015	Date of Injury:	07/05/2008
Decision Date:	07/02/2015	UR Denial Date:	04/21/2015
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	05/21/2015

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 is a 43 year old female, who sustained an industrial injury on July 5, 2008. Treatment to date has included cervical facet joint injection, medications, and MRI of the cervical spine. Currently, the injured worker complains of chronic neck, upper extremity and low back pain. The injured worker describes having persistent neck pain which radiates into her upper back and having muscle spasms. She reports that she had some benefit from a cervical steroid injection given on February 10, 2015. The relief lasted only two weeks and she reports that her pain is back to baseline. On physical examination the injured worker had a normal, non-antalgic gait and ambulated without assistance. She had tenderness to palpation over the cervical facet joints bilaterally with muscle tension extending into the bilateral upper trapezius muscles. Her cervical spine range of motion was decreased bilaterally and her axial loading of the cervical facet joints were positive for pain. The diagnoses associated with the request include degeneration of the cervical disc, ulnar nerve lesion, pain in the thoracic spine and spinal stenosis. The treatment plan includes bilateral cervical facet joint injection at C5-C6 and C6-C7 and medications.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Bilateral cervical facet joint injections at C5-6, C6-7 under fluoroscopic guidance with intravenous (IV) sedation: Upheld

Claims Administrator guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 8 Neck and Upper Back Complaints.

MAXIMUS guideline: Decision based on MTUS ACOEM Chapter 8 Neck and Upper Back Complaints Page(s): 181. Decision based on Non-MTUS Citation Facet joint intra-articular injections (therapeutic blocks)
(http://worklossdatainstitute.verioiponly.com/odgtwc/low_back.htm#Facetjointinjections).

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 did not support facet injection for cervical pain in this context. There is no strong evidence supporting the use of cervical facet injection for the treatment of neck pain. There is no documentation that the cervical facets are the main pain generator. There is no documentation of formal rehabilitation plan that will be used in addition to facet injections. Therefore, the request for Bilateral cervical facet joint injections at C5-6, C6-7 under fluoroscopic guidance with intravenous (IV) sedation is not medically necessary.