

Case Number:	CM14-0187880		
Date Assigned:	11/18/2014	Date of Injury:	10/14/1998
Decision Date:	01/06/2015	UR Denial Date:	10/27/2014
Priority:	Standard	Application Received:	11/11/2014

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. The expert reviewer is Board Certified in Occupational Medicine and is licensed to practice in California. 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/services. He/she is familiar with governing laws and regulations, including the strength of evidence hierarchy that applies to Independent Medical Review determinations.

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 [REDACTED] employee who has filed a claim for chronic low back pain and derivative complaints of psychological stress reportedly associated with an industrial injury of October 14, 1998. Thus far, the applicant has been treated with the following: Analgesic medications; transfer of care to and from various providers in various specialties; psychological counseling; earlier lumbar spine surgery with subsequent revision; epidural steroid injection therapy; unspecified amounts of physical therapy; and apparent participation in a chronic pain program/functional restoration program. In a Utilization Review report dated October 27, 2014, the claims administrator failed to approve a request for Norco. The claims administrator stated that its decision was based on an earlier UR report of May 8, 2014 and an RFA form of October 28, 2014, associated with date of service of October 17, 2014. In a November 14, 2014 progress note, the applicant reported ongoing complaints of low back pain. The applicant stated that her medications, including Norco, Remeron, Klonopin, Elavil, and Zoloft, were ameliorating her ability to clean, cook, move around the house and take care of her young granddaughter. The applicant was using Norco at rate of thrice daily. Multifocal complaints of ankle, wrist, knee and low back pain were appreciated. 9/10 pain without medications was appreciated versus 6/10 pain with medications. The applicant was still smoking, however. The applicant was asked to continue Norco. The applicant was described as "disabled/retired." In October 17, 2014 progress note, the applicant reported ongoing complaints of low back pain. The applicant stated that medications were ameliorating her ability to cook, clean, perform household chores, and take care of her new granddaughter. The applicant's medications included Norco, Remeron, Klonopin, Elavil, and Zoloft. 9/10 pain without medications versus 6 to 8/10 pain with medications was appreciated. Norco and Senna were renewed.

IMR ISSUES, DECISIONS AND RATIONALES

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

Norco 10/325mg: Overturned

Claims Administrator guideline: The Claims Administrator did not cite any medical evidence for its decision.

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

Decision rationale: 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, while the applicant has failed to return to work, ongoing usage of Norco has appropriately attenuated the applicant's pain complaints from 9/10 without medications to 6/10 with medications and is facilitating the applicant's ability to care for her granddaughter, perform household chores, perform cooking, and performing cleaning. All of the foregoing, taken together, does suggest that the applicant is deriving appropriate improvements in pain and function with ongoing Norco usage. Continuing the same, on balance, was therefore indicated. Accordingly, the request is medically necessary.