

True Decisions Inc.

An Independent Review Organization
835 E. Lamar Blvd. #394
Arlington, TX 76011
Fax: 214-594-8608

Notice of Independent Review Decision

DATE OF REVIEW: June 7, 2008

IRO CASE #:

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE

Sacral Medial Branch Neurotomy—Left

A DESCRIPTION OF THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR EACH PHYSICIAN OR OTHER HEALTH CARE PROVIDER WHO REVIEWED THE DECISION

Board Certified in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

REVIEW OUTCOME

Upon independent review the reviewer finds that the previous adverse determination/adverse determinations should be:

- Upheld (Agree)
 Overturned (Disagree)
 Partially Overturned (Agree in part/Disagree in part)

INFORMATION PROVIDED TO THE IRO FOR REVIEW

OD Guidelines
Denial Letters 5/13/08 and 5/21/08
Medical Records from 3/5/08, 4/10/08, 5/8/08, and 5/20/08
Joint Injections 4/24/08 and 3/27/08
MRI 1/31/08
DDE 3/28/08
Records from Services 1/4/08 thru 2/12/08

PATIENT CLINICAL HISTORY [SUMMARY]:

This is a xx year old man who reportedly injured his back with a “wrenching” injury on xx/xx/xx. His pain is more in his back, but some goes into the left lower extremity. He had a prior back injury and fusion in 1997. He made a good recovery then. He had left sided SI injections on 3/27 and 4/24/08. Each gave 100% relief of his back pain, but only for a week. The pain then recurred. The treating doctor wants to perform a neurectomy to the SI joint including the posterior division of the L5 root and the lateral branches of the S1-3 roots. An MRI described some stenosis and changes post fusion.

ANALYSIS AND EXPLANATION OF THE DECISION INCLUDE CLINICAL BASIS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS USED TO SUPPORT THE DECISION.

There is no means on physical examination to prove that the SI joint is the etiology of pain. Numerous studies show that some of the reported physical signs may be present in some people, and absent in others. SI injections are also considered a means of confirming and treating SI pain. Also, the issues of false positive results remain. The ODG descriptions for sacroiliac blocks are as follows:

Sacroiliac joint blocks review as follows.

Recommended as an option

if failed at least 4-6 weeks of aggressive conservative therapy as indicated below. Sacroiliac dysfunction is poorly defined and the diagnosis is often difficult to make due to the presence of other low back pathology (including spinal stenosis and facet arthropathy). The diagnosis is also difficult to make as pain symptoms may depend on the region of the SI joint that is involved (anterior, posterior, and/or extra-articular ligaments). Pain may radiate into the buttock, groin and entire ipsilateral lower limb, although if pain is present above L5, it is not thought to be from the SI joint.

Innervation: The anterior portion is thought to be innervated by the posterior rami of the L1-S2 roots and the posterior portion by the posterior rami of L4-S3. although the actual innervation remains unclear.

Anterior innervation may also be supplied by the obturator nerve, superior gluteal nerve and/or lumbosacral trunk. (Vallejo, 2006) Other research supports innervation by the S1 and S2 sacral dorsal rami.

Etiology: includes degenerative joint disease, joint laxity, and trauma (such as a fall to the buttock). The main cause is SI joint disruption from significant pelvic trauma.

Diagnosis: Specific tests for motion palpation and pain provocation have been described for SI joint dysfunction: Cranial Shear Test; Extension Test; Flamingo Test; Fortin Finger Test; Gaenslen’s Test; Gillet’s Test (One Legged-Stork Test); Patrick’s Test (FABER); Pelvic Compression Test; Pelvic Distraction Test; Pelvic Rock Test; Resisted Abduction Test (REAB); Sacroiliac Shear Test; Standing Flexion Test; Seated Flexion Test; Thigh Thrust Test (POSH). Imaging studies are not **helpful. It has been questioned as to whether SI joint blocks are the “diagnostic gold standard.” The block is felt to show low sensitivity, and discordance has been noted between two consecutive blocks (questioning validity).** (Schwarzer, 1995) There is also concern that pain relief from diagnostic blocks may be confounded by infiltration of extra-articular ligaments, adjacent muscles, or sheaths of the nerve roots themselves. Sacral lateral branch injections have demonstrated a lack of diagnostic power and area not endorsed for this purpose. (Yin, 2003)

Treatment: There is limited research suggesting therapeutic blocks offer long-term effect. There should be evidence of a trial of aggressive conservative treatment (at least six weeks of a comprehensive exercise program, local icing, mobilization/manipulation and anti-inflammatories) as well as evidence of a clinical picture that is suggestive of sacroiliac injury and/or disease prior to a first SI joint block. If helpful, the blocks may be repeated; however, the frequency of these injections should be limited with attention placed on the comprehensive exercise program. (Forst, 2006) (Berthelot, 2006) (van der Wurff, 2006) (Laslett, 2005) (Zelle, 2005) (McKenzie-Brown 2005) (Pekkafahli, 2003) (Manchikanti, 2003) (Slipman, 2001) (Nelemans-Cochrane, 2000) See also [Intra-articular steroid hip injection](#); & [Sacroiliac joint radiofrequency neurotomy](#).

Criteria for the use of sacroiliac blocks:

1. The history and physical should suggest the diagnosis (with documentation of at least 3 positive exam findings as listed above).
2. Diagnostic evaluation must first address any other possible pain generators.
3. The patient has had and failed at least 4-6 weeks of aggressive conservative therapy including PT, home exercise and medication management.
4. Blocks are performed under fluoroscopy.
5. A positive diagnostic response is recorded as 80% for the duration of the local anesthetic. If the first block is not positive, a second diagnostic block is not performed.
6. If steroids are injected during the initial injection, the duration of pain relief should be at least 6 weeks with at least > 70% pain relief recorded for this period.
- 7. In the treatment or therapeutic phase (after the stabilization is completed), the suggested frequency for repeat blocks is 2 months or longer between each injection, provided that at least >70% pain relief is obtained for 6 weeks.**
8. The block is not to be performed on the same day as a lumbar epidural steroid injection (ESI), transforaminal ESI, facet joint injection or medial branch block.
- 9. In the treatment or therapeutic phase, the interventional procedures should be repeated only as necessary judging by the medical necessity criteria, and these should be limited to a maximum of 4 times for local anesthetic and steroid blocks over a period of 1 year.**

Compounding this is the ODG criteria for sacral medial branch neurotomy. The requesting physician did not describe the technique he planned to use. The ODG does not describe a neurotomy, but rather the radiofrequency neurectomy. It does not approve this based on the studies reviewed. If the doctor is planning a different technique, then this may be considered.

Sacroiliac joint radiofrequency neurotomy

Not recommended. Multiple techniques are currently described: (1) a bipolar system using radiofrequency probes ([Ferrante, 2001](#)); (2) sensory stimulation-guided sacral lateral branch radiofrequency neurotomy ([Yin, W 2003](#)); (3) lateral branch blocks (nerve blocks of the L4-5 primary dorsal rami and S1-S3 lateral branches) ([Cohen, 2005](#)); & (4) pulsed radiofrequency denervation (PRFD) of the medial branch of L4, the posterior rami of L5 and lateral branches of S1 and S2. ([Vallejo, 2006](#)) This latter study applied the technique to patients with confirmatory block diagnosis of SI joint pain that did not have long-term relief from these diagnostic injections (22 patients). There was no explanation of why pulsed radiofrequency denervation was successful when other conservative treatment was not. **A > 50% reduction in VAS score was found for 16 of these patients with a mean duration of relief of 20 ± 5.7 weeks. The use of all of these techniques has been questioned, in part, due to the fact that the innervation of the SI joint remains unclear.** There is also controversy over the correct technique for radiofrequency denervation. **A recent review of this intervention in a journal sponsored by the American Society of Interventional Pain Physicians found that the evidence was limited for this procedure.** ([Hansen, 2007](#)) See also [Intra-articular steroid hip injection](#); & [Sacroiliac joint blocks](#).

A DESCRIPTION AND THE SOURCE OF THE SCREENING CRITERIA OR OTHER CLINICAL BASIS USED TO MAKE THE DECISION:

- ACOEM- AMERICAN COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE UM KNOWLEDGEBASE
- AHCPR- AGENCY FOR HEALTHCARE RESEARCH & QUALITY GUIDELINES
- DWC- DIVISION OF WORKERS COMPENSATION POLICIES OR GUIDELINES
- EUROPEAN GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT OF CHRONIC LOW BACK PAIN
- INTERQUAL CRITERIA
- MEDICAL JUDGEMENT, CLINICAL EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ACCEPTED MEDICAL STANDARDS
- MERCY CENTER CONSENSUS CONFERENCE GUIDELINES
- MILLIMAN CARE GUIDELINES
- ODG- OFFICIAL DISABILITY GUIDELINES & TREATMENT GUIDELINES
- PRESSLEY REED, THE MEDICAL DISABILITY ADVISOR
- TEXAS GUIDELINES FOR CHIROPRACTIC QUALITY ASSURANCE & PRACTICE PARAMETERS
- TEXAS TACADA GUIDELINES
- TMF SCREENING CRITERIA MANUAL

- PEER REVIEWED NATIONALLY ACCEPTED MEDICAL LITERATURE
(PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION)**

- OTHER EVIDENCE BASED, SCIENTIFICALLY VALID, OUTCOME
FOCUSED GUIDELINES (PROVIDE A DESCRIPTION)**