



Medical Review Institute of America, Inc.  
America's External Review Network

DATE OF REVIEW: May 29, 2008

IRO Case #:

Description of the services in dispute:

Work hardening – CPT #97545 and #97548 for dates of service 2/4/08 – 2/8/08.

A description of the qualifications for each physician or other health care provider who reviewed the decision

The physician providing this review is board certified in Anesthesiology. The reviewer holds additional certification in Pain Medicine from the American Board of Pain Medicine. The reviewer is a diplomate of the National Board of Medical Examiners. The reviewer has served as a research associate in the department of physics at MIT. The reviewer has received his PhD in Physics from MIT. The reviewer is currently the chief of Anesthesiology at a local hospital and is the co-chairman of Anesthesiology at another area hospital. The reviewer has been in active practice since 1978.

Review Outcome

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

Overtured.

The work hardening program from 2/4/08 through 2/8/08 with CPT codes #97545 and #97548 was medically necessary. The claimant satisfied the ODG criteria for entry into a work hardening program.

Patient clinical history [summary]

The claimant is a xx year old gentleman who suffered a workplace injury on xx/xx/xx. Subsequently he developed neck and suboccipital pain that radiated down his left arm. Physical examination was unremarkable except for tenderness in the post-auricular area, limitation of range of motion of the cervical spine, and trigger points in the cervical spine muscles. In particular, neurological findings were normal. An MRI examination of the cervical spine revealed degenerative disc disease without frank disc herniation or nerve root compression. EMG revealed signs of radiculopathy of the C5 and C6 nerve roots bilaterally. He was initially treated conservatively with low-doses of opioids and with chiropractic manipulation and physical therapy which did not result

in satisfactory resolution of his pain. He underwent a chronic pain management program because of his lack of progress and developing depression. At the conclusion of the program, his physical capacity had increased dramatically, and he was now able to lift 60 pounds; however, his employer required an ability to lift 85 pounds to return to his previous employment. Following the four days of work hardening his physical abilities met the employer's requirements and he returned to work successfully.

Analysis and explanation of the decision include clinical basis, findings and conclusions used to support the decision.

The claimant satisfied the ODG criteria for entry into a work hardening program 2/4/08 through 2/8/08. In particular, following completion of the chronic pain program, he had recovered sufficiently to allow his participation in work hardening; however his physical demand level was still below that required to return to his previous employment. His employer had apparently expressed a desire for him to return to work when the necessary heavy physical demand level was met. The claimant was subjected to a screening process including psychological evaluation. Finally, his workplace injury was significantly less than two years before the beginning of the work hardening. It should be noted that, although not a factor in determining the medical necessity for the work hardening, this treatment was successful in restoring him to a physical demand level sufficient to allow his return to work; this is a primary goal of the treatment of injured workers. The work hardening program from 2/4/08 through 2/8/08 with CPT codes #97545 and #97548 was medically necessary.

A description and the source of the screening criteria or other clinical basis used to make the decision:

ODG Criteria for admission to a Work Hardening Program:

1. Physical recovery sufficient to allow for progressive reactivation and participation for a minimum of 4 hours a day for three to five days a week.
2. A defined return to work goal agreed to by the employer & employee:
  - a. A documented specific job to return to, OR
  - b. Documented on-the-job training
3. The worker must be able to benefit from the program. Approval of these programs should require a screening process that includes file review, interview and testing to determine likelihood of success in the program.
4. The worker must be no more than 2 years past date of injury. Workers that have not returned to work by two years post injury may not benefit.
5. Program timelines: Work Hardening Programs should be completed in 4 weeks or less.

ODG Treatment Guidelines, Low Back. Web Edition. Encinitas, CA: Work Loss Data Institute, 2006.

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