

Notice of Independent Review Decision

DATE OF REVIEW:

01/11/2010

IRO CASE #:

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE

One bilateral medical branch block facet injections at levels L4-L5 and L5-S1 between 12/08/2009 and 02/06/2010.

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

Doctor of Osteopathy, Board Certified Anesthesiologist, Specializing in Pain Management

REVIEW OUTCOME

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

Provide a description of the review outcome that clearly states whether or not medical necessity exists for each of the health care services in dispute.

The requested one bilateral medical branch block facet injections at levels L4-L5 and L5-S1 between 12/08/2009 and 02/06/2010 is not medically necessary.

INFORMATION PROVIDED TO THE IRO FOR REVIEW

- TDI/DIVISION OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION referral form
- 12/22/09 MCMC Referral
- 12/22/09 Notice To Utilization Review Agent of Assignment, DWC
- 12/22/09 Confirmation Of Receipt Of A Request For A Review, DWC
- 12/22/09 Notice To MCMC, LLC Of Case Assignment, DWC
- 12/21/09 Request For A Review By An Independent Review Organization
- 12/15/09 report from ESIS Utilization Review Unit
- 12/15/09 physician review report, DO
- 12/02/09, 12/08/09 letters from Attorneys At Law
- 11/23/09 report from ESIS Utilization Review Unit
- 11/23/09 physician review report, DO
- 11/18/09 Pre-Authorization Request, xxxxx
- 11/17/09 Pain Assessment Form, xxxxx
- 11/04/09 Operative Report, M.D.,xxxxx
- 09/02/09 Health Insurance Claim Form, M.D.
- 09/02/09 Established Patient Office Visit, FNP-C,xxxxxxx

- Note: Carrier did not supply ODG Guidelines.

PATIENT CLINICAL HISTORY [SUMMARY]:

The injured individual is a male with lumbar strain from date of injury xx/xx. There is no MRI. The injured individual has back pain, tenderness over the lower two facet joints, negative straight leg raise (SLR), and right thigh hypoesthesia. He had one set of bilateral L4-S1 medial branch blocks on 11/04/2009. This provided about 75% relief for thirteen days.

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

The injured individual had one diagnostic L4-S1 medial branch block on 11/04/2009 with 75% relief for almost two weeks. Official Disability Guideline recommends only one set of these injections as they are diagnostic in nature. The injured individual's response was noted to be positive. Further, repeat injections are not indicated since the diagnosis has been documented based on his response to the first set of medial nerve blocks.

A DESCRIPTION AND THE SOURCE OF THE SCREENING CRITERIA OR OTHER CLINICAL BASIS USED TO MAKE THE DECISION:**ODG- OFFICIAL DISABILITY GUIDELINES & TREATMENT GUIDELINES**

Official Disability Guidelines:

Recommend no more than one set of medial branch diagnostic blocks prior to facet neurotomy, if neurotomy is chosen as an option for treatment (a procedure that is still considered "under study"). Diagnostic blocks may be performed with the anticipation that if successful, treatment may proceed to facet neurotomy at the diagnosed levels. Current research indicates that a minimum of one diagnostic block be performed prior to a neurotomy, and that this be a medial branch block (MBB). Although it is suggested that MBBs and intra-articular blocks appear to provide comparable diagnostic information, the results of placebo-controlled trials of neurotomy found better predictive effect with diagnostic MBBs. In addition, the same nerves are tested with the MBB as are treated with the neurotomy. The use of a confirmatory block has been strongly suggested due to the high rate of false positives with single blocks (range of 25% to 40%) but this does not appear to be cost effective or to prevent the incidence of false positive response to the neurotomy procedure itself. (Cohen, 2007) (Bogduk, 2000) (Cohen2, 2007) (Mancchukonda, 2007) (Dreyfuss, 2000) (Manchikanti2, 2003) (Datta, 2009)

Etiology of false positive blocks: Placebo response (18-32%), use of sedation, liberal use of local anesthetic, and spread of injectate to other pain generators. The concomitant use of sedative during the block can also interfere with an accurate diagnosis. (Cohen, 2007)

MBB procedure: The technique for medial branch blocks in the lumbar region requires a block of 2 medial branch nerves (MBN). The recommendation is the following: (1) L1-L2 (T12 and L1 MBN); (2) L2-L3 (L1 and L2 MBN); (3) L3-L4 (L2 and L3 MBN); (4) L4-L5 (L3 and L4 MBN); (5) L5-S1: the L4 and L5 MBN are blocked, and it is recommended that S1 nerve be blocked at the superior articular process. Blocking two joints such as L3-4 and L4-5 will require blocks of three nerves (L2, L3 and L4). Blocking L4-5 and L5-S1 will require blocks of L3, L4, L5 with the option of blocking S1. (Clemans, 2005) The volume of injectate for diagnostic medial branch blocks must be kept to a minimum (a trace amount of contrast with no more than 0.5 cc of injectate), as increased volume may anesthetize other potential areas of pain generation and confound the ability of the block to accurately diagnose

facet pathology. Specifically, the concern is that the lateral and intermediate branches will be blocked; nerves that innervate the paraspinal muscles and fascia, ligaments, sacroiliac joints and skin. (Cohen, 2007) Intraarticular blocks also have limitations due to the fact that they can be technically challenging, and if the joint capsule ruptures, injectate may diffuse to the epidural space, intervertebral foramen, ligamentum flavum and paraspinal musculature. (Cohen, 2007) (Washington, 2005) (Manchikanti, 2003) (Dreyfuss, 2003) (BlueCross BlueShield, 2004) (Pneumatics, 2006) (Boswell, 2007) (Boswell2, 2007) A recent meta-analysis concluded that there is insufficient evidence to evaluate validity or utility of diagnostic selective nerve root block, intra-articular facet joint block, medial branch block, or sacroiliac joint block as diagnostic procedures for low back pain with or without radiculopathy. (Chou2, 2009) See also Facet joint pain, signs & symptoms; Facet joint radiofrequency neurotomy; Facet joint medial branch blocks (therapeutic injections); & Facet joint intra-articular injections (therapeutic blocks). Also see Neck Chapter and Pain Chapter.

Criteria for the use of diagnostic blocks for facet “mediated” pain:

Clinical presentation should be consistent with facet joint pain, signs & symptoms.

1. One set of diagnostic medial branch blocks is required with a response of $\geq 70\%$. The pain response should be approximately 2 hours for Lidocaine.
2. Limited to patients with low-back pain that is non-radicular and at no more than two levels bilaterally.
3. There is documentation of failure of conservative treatment (including home exercise, PT and NSAIDs) prior to the procedure for at least 4-6 weeks.
4. No more than 2 facet joint levels are injected in one session (see above for medial branch block levels).
5. Recommended volume of no more than 0.5 cc of injectate is given to each joint.
6. No pain medication from home should be taken for at least 4 hours prior to the diagnostic block and for 4 to 6 hours afterward.
7. Opioids should not be given as a “sedative” during the procedure.
8. The use of IV sedation (including other agents such as midazolam) may be grounds to negate the results of a diagnostic block, and should only be given in cases of extreme anxiety.
9. The patient should document pain relief with an instrument such as a VAS scale, emphasizing the importance of recording the maximum pain relief and maximum duration of pain. The patient should also keep medication use and activity logs to support subjective reports of better pain control.
10. Diagnostic facet blocks should not be performed in patients in whom a surgical procedure is anticipated. (Resnick, 2005)
11. Diagnostic facet blocks should not be performed in patients who have had a previous fusion procedure at the planned injection level. [Exclusion Criteria that would require UR physician review: Previous fusion at the targeted level. (Franklin, 2008)]

Facet joint injections, lumbar

See Facet joint injections, multiple series; Facet joint diagnostic blocks (injections); Facet joint intra-articular injections (therapeutic blocks); Facet joint medial branch blocks (therapeutic injections); Facet joint pain, signs & symptoms; & Facet joint radiofrequency neurotomy. Also see Neck Chapter and Pain Chapter.

Facet joint injections, multiple series: Not recommended.



Diagnostic blocks: One set of medial branch blocks is recommended prior to a neurotomy. Intra-articular blocks are not recommended as the diagnostic procedure. Confirmatory blocks, while recommended for research studies, do not appear to be cost effective or to prevent the incidence of a false positive response to the neurotomy procedure itself. See Facet joint diagnostic blocks (injections).

Therapeutic injections: With respect to facet joint intra-articular therapeutic injections, 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). See Facet joint intra-articular injections (therapeutic blocks). There is no peer-reviewed literature to support a “series” of therapeutic fact blocks.