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NOTICE OF INDEPENDENT REVIEW DECISION

DATE OF REVIEW:

Jun/16/2010

IRO CASE #:

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE:

Lumbar Discogram w/ post CT L4-5 L5-S1 with control L3-4 62290 72295 77003 72132.

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

M.D., Board Certified Orthopedic Surgeon

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

PATIENT CLINICAL HISTORY SUMMARY

This is a female claimant who reportedly injured her low back and left knee in xx/xxxx as a result of a slip and fall. The records indicated that the claimant was diagnosed with a herniated nucleus pulposus at L4-5 with lumbar radiculopathy. A lumbar laminotomy at L4-5 with partial disc excision was performed in xxxxx. This was followed by a diagnosis of a recurrent herniated lumbar disc at L4-5 with a left L4-5 laminotomy, discectomy and wide foraminotomy performed in xxxx.

Physician records of xxxxx revealed the claimant with low back and left knee pain with a noted exacerbation of symptoms. Conservative care included medications and work restrictions. An EMG performed on xxxxx showed evidence most consistent with active denervation/reinnervation processes involving the left L5 and left S1 nerve roots. Followup physician records in 2010 noted the claimant with continued complaints of lower back and left lower extremity pain. The back pain was reported to be seventy percent and the leg pain thirty

percent. A lumbar MRI performed on 01/20/10 reportedly was sub optimal. A lumbar CT myelogram dated 02/26/10 showed no nerve root impingement at L4-5 and L5- S1.

A physician record dated 04/26/10 noted the claimant with constant low back pain and occasional lower extremity numbness and tingling. A psychological screening had been completed which revealed the claimant with no barriers to recovery. The claimant was diagnosed with failed lumbar surgery with consideration for a discectomy and fusion to address the mechanical back pain. A pre-operative discogram as a planning tool was recommended. The claimant was noted to be a non smoker.

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

The requested lumbar discogram with post CT scan is not medically necessary based on review of this medical record. This is a woman who has had ongoing back and leg pain of more recent onset following two lumbar disc operations, the most recent being a 12/06/06 recurrent L4-5 discectomy with removal of scar tissue. She has had ongoing back and left leg complaints and had a more recent 10/23/09 EMG documenting electrical changes of the left L5 and S1 nerve roots. She has also undergone a 01/20/10 MRI lumbar spine that was done without contrast and apparently there were technical issues making the scan not that good. She then had a 02/26/10 CT lumbar myelogram that shows a questionable hematoma versus cyst and an MRI was recommended. Dr. appears to be planning a lumbar fusion procedure and is requesting a discogram for verification.

ODG Guidelines indicate that the use of discography does not have good long term success and it is hard to make a determination as to the necessity of surgical intervention and/or fusion using a discogram. A high quality lumbar MRI with contrast would be capable of determining the difference between a recurrent disc herniation and scar tissue, hematoma, and/or arachnoid cyst. Obviously the 01/20/10 MRI of the lumbar spine was done without contrast and there were technical issues rendering it an incomplete study. The reviewer finds that medical necessity does not exist for Lumbar Discogram w/ post CT L4-5 L5-S1 with control L3-4 62290 72295 77003 72132.

Official Disability Guidelines Treatment in Worker's Comp 2010 Updates, Low Back: Discography

Not recommended. In the past, discography has been used as part of the pre-operative evaluation of patients for consideration of surgical intervention for lower back pain. However, the conclusions of recent, high quality studies on discography have significantly questioned the use of discography results as a preoperative indication for either IDET or spinal fusion. These studies have suggested that reproduction of the patient's specific back complaints on injection of one or more discs (concordance of symptoms) is of limited diagnostic value. (Pain production was found to be common in non-back pain patients, pain reproduction was found to be inaccurate in many patients with chronic back pain and abnormal psychosocial testing, and in this latter patient type, the test itself was sometimes found to produce significant symptoms in non-back pain controls more than a year after testing.) Also, the findings of discography have not been shown to consistently correlate well with the finding of a High Intensity Zone (HIZ) on MRI. Discography may be justified if the decision has already been made to do a spinal fusion, and a negative discogram could rule out the need for fusion (but a positive discogram in itself would not allow fusion). (Carragee-Spine, 2000) (Carragee2- Spine, 2000) (Carragee3-Spine, 2000) (Carragee4-Spine, 2000) (Bigos, 1999) (ACR, 2000) (Resnick, 2002) (Madan, 2002) (Carragee-Spine, 2004) (Carragee2, 2004) (Maghout-Juratli, 2006) (Pneumaticos, 2006) (Airaksinen, 2006) (Manchikanti, 2009) Discography may be supported if the decision has already been made to do a spinal fusion, and a negative discogram could rule out the need for fusion on that disc (but a positive discogram in itself would not justify fusion). Discography may help distinguish asymptomatic discs among morphologically abnormal discs in patients without psychosocial issues. Precise prospective categorization of discographic diagnoses may predict outcomes from treatment, surgical or otherwise. (Derby, 2005) (Derby2, 2005) (Derby, 1999)

Positive discography was not highly predictive in identifying outcomes from spinal fusion. A recent study found only a 27% success from spinal fusion in patients with low back pain and a positive single-level low-pressure provocative discogram, versus a 72% success in patients having a well-accepted single-level lumbar pathology of unstable spondylolisthesis. (Carragee, 2006) The prevalence of positive discogram may be increased in subjects with chronic low back pain who have had prior surgery at the level tested for lumbar disc herniation. (Heggeness, 1997) Invasive diagnostics such as provocative discography have not been proven to be accurate for diagnosing various spinal conditions, and their ability to effectively guide therapeutic choices and improve ultimate patient outcomes is uncertain. (Chou, 2008) Although discography, especially combined with CT scanning, may be more accurate than other radiologic studies in detecting degenerative disc disease, its ability to improve surgical outcomes has yet to be proven. It is routinely used before IDET, yet only occasionally used before spinal fusion. (Cohen, 2005) Provocative discography is not recommended because its diagnostic accuracy remains uncertain, false-positives can occur in persons without low back pain, and its use has not been shown to improve clinical outcomes. (Chou, 2009) This recent RCT concluded that, compared with discography, injection of a small amount of bupivacaine into the painful disc was a better tool for the diagnosis of discogenic LBP. (Ohtori, 2009) Discography may cause disc degeneration. Even modern discography techniques using small gauge needle and limited pressurization resulted in accelerated disc degeneration (35% in the discography group compared to 14% in the control group), disc herniation, loss of disc height and signal and the development of reactive endplate changes compared to match-controls. These findings are of concern for several reasons. Discography as a diagnostic test is controversial and in view of these findings the utility of this test should be reviewed. Furthermore, discography in current practice will often include injecting discs with a low probability of being symptomatic in an effort to validate other disc injections, a so-called control disc. Although this strategy has never been confirmed to increase test validity or utility, injecting normal discs even with small gauge needles appears to increase the rate of degeneration in these discs over time. The phenomenon of accelerated adjacent segment degeneration adjacent to fusion levels may be, in part, explained by previous disc puncture if discography was used in segments adjacent to the fusion. Similarly, intradiscal therapeutic strategies (injecting steroids, sclerosing agents, growth factors, etc.) have been proposed as a method to treat, arrest or prevent symptomatic disc disease. This study suggests that the injection procedure itself is not completely innocuous and a recalculation of these demonstrated risks versus hypothetical benefits should be considered. (Carragee, 2009) Discography involves the injection of a water-soluble imaging material directly into the nucleus pulposus of the disc. Information is then recorded about the pressure in the disc at the initiation and completion of injection, about the amount of dye accepted, about the configuration and distribution of the dye in the disc, about the quality and intensity of the patient's pain experience and about the pressure at which that pain experience is produced. Both routine x-ray imaging during the injection and post-injection CT examination of the injected discs are usually performed as part of the study. There are two diagnostic objectives: (1) to evaluate radiographically the extent of disc damage on discogram and (2) to characterize the pain response (if any) on disc injection to see if it compares with the typical pain symptoms the patient has been experiencing. Criteria exist to grade the degree of disc degeneration from none (normal disc) to severe. A symptomatic degenerative disc is considered one that disperses injected contrast in an abnormal, degenerative pattern, extending to the outer margins of the annulus and at the same time reproduces the patient's lower back complaints (concordance) at a low injection pressure. Discography is not a sensitive test for radiculopathy and has no role in its confirmation. It is, rather, a confirmatory test in the workup of axial back pain and its validity is intimately tied to its indications and performance. As stated, it is the end of a diagnostic workup in a patient who has failed all reasonable conservative care and remains highly symptomatic. Its validity is enhanced (and only achieves potential meaningfulness) in the context of an MRI showing both dark discs and bright, normal discs -- both of which need testing as an internal validity measure.

And the discogram needs to be performed according to contemporary diagnostic criteria -- namely, a positive response should be low pressure, concordant at equal to or greater than a VAS of 7/10 and demonstrate degenerative changes (dark disc) on MRI and the discogram

with negative findings of at least one normal disc on MRI and discogram. See also Functional anesthetic discography (FAD)

Discography is Not Recommended in ODG

Patient selection criteria for Discography if provider & payor agree to perform anyway

- o Back pain of at least 3 months duration

- o Failure of recommended conservative treatment including active physical therapy

- o An MRI demonstrating one or more degenerated discs as well as one or more normal appearing discs to allow for an internal control injection (injection of a normal disc to validate the procedure by a lack of a pain response to that injection)

- o Satisfactory results from detailed psychosocial assessment (discography in subjects with emotional and chronic pain problems has been linked to reports of significant back pain for prolonged periods after injection, and therefore should be avoided)

- o Intended as a screen for surgery, i.e., the surgeon feels that lumbar spine fusion is appropriate but is looking for this to determine if it is not indicated (although discography is not highly predictive) (Carragee, 2006) NOTE: In a situation where the selection criteria and other surgical indications for fusion are conditionally met, discography can be considered in preparation for the surgical procedure. However, all of the qualifying conditions must be met prior to proceeding to discography as discography should be viewed as a non-diagnostic but confirmatory study for selecting operative levels for the proposed surgical procedure. Discography should not be ordered for a patient who does not meet surgical criteria

- o Briefed on potential risks and benefits from discography and surgery

- o Single level testing (with control) (Colorado, 2001)

- o Due to high rates of positive discogram after surgery for lumbar disc herniation, this should be potential reason for non-certification.

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

ACOEM-AMERICA 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)