



Notice of Independent Review Decision

DATE OF REVIEW:

06/04/2010

IRO CASE #:

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE

Outpatient lumbar transforaminal epidural and selective nerve root block (64483 and 64450).

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 outpatient lumbar transforaminal epidural and selective nerve root block (64483 and 64450) are not medically necessary.

INFORMATION PROVIDED TO THE IRO FOR REVIEW

PATIENT CLINICAL HISTORY [SUMMARY]:

The injured individual is an obese female with date of injury xx/xxxx. The MRI and CT showed bulges and right L5/S1 protrusions impacting the S1 root. The electromyogram (EMG) was negative. The injured individual had no physical therapy (PT) documented. The injured individual had consistent findings of right leg pain, positive straight leg raise (SLR), sensory loss, and patellar reflex loss. The attending provider (AP) did one right L4/5 transforaminal epidural (TFE) in 01/2010. Notes by the AP after the TFE indicate good relief for five days, then only right leg pain relief for two and one half months, then eight weeks of good relief. She saw her orthopedist in 03/2010 and his note state the injured individual had only temporary benefit from the ESI.

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

First, a TFE and a selective nerve root block (SNB) is essentially the same thing. Performing two at the same time to the same level is not indicated. Second, there is no indication the injured individual attempted PT or chiropractics as a conservative treatment. Also, the injured individual had one TFE in 01/2010 and had an orthopaedic evaluation (not the requesting provider) in 03/2010. The orthopaedist stated the injured individual had one ESI and one facet injection with temporary benefit. Dr. 's notes indicate the TFE helped the right leg pain but not the back pain but his duration is unclear as some notes state it helped for five days and others indicate it helped for up to three months and his appeal letter states it helped eight weeks. The lack of consensus and clarity and the lack of corroboration from another provider as to its result do not support repeating it. Although Dr. reports it helped, there is no indication the injured individual was more functional, reduced her medications, etc.

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

Criteria for the use of Epidural steroid injections:

Note: The purpose of ESI is to reduce pain and inflammation, thereby facilitating progress in more active treatment programs, and avoiding surgery, but this treatment alone offers no significant long-term functional benefit.

- (1) Radiculopathy must be documented. Objective findings on examination need to be present. For unequivocal evidence of radiculopathy, see AMA Guides, 5th Edition, page 382-383. (Andersson, 2000)
- (2) Initially unresponsive to conservative treatment (exercises, physical methods, NSAIDs and muscle relaxants).
- (3) Injections should be performed using fluoroscopy (live x-ray) and injection of contrast for guidance.
- (4) Diagnostic Phase: At the time of initial use of an ESI (formally referred to as the "diagnostic phase" as initial injections indicate whether success will be obtained with this treatment intervention), a maximum of one to two injections should be performed. A repeat block is not recommended if there is inadequate response to the first block (< 30% is a standard placebo response). A second block is also not indicated if the first block is accurately placed unless: (a) there is a question of the pain generator; (b) there was possibility of inaccurate placement; or (c) there is evidence of multilevel pathology. In these cases a different level or approach might be proposed. There should be an interval of at least one to two weeks between injections.

- (5) No more than two nerve root levels should be injected using transforaminal blocks.
- (6) No more than one interlaminar level should be injected at one session.
- (7) Therapeutic phase: If after the initial block/blocks are given (see “Diagnostic Phase” above) and found to produce pain relief of at least 50-70% pain relief for at least 6-8 weeks, additional blocks may be required. This is generally referred to as the “therapeutic phase.” Indications for repeat blocks include acute exacerbation of pain, or new onset of symptoms. The general consensus recommendation is for no more than 4 blocks per region per year. (CMS, 2004) (Boswell, 2007)
- (8) Repeat injections should be based on continued objective documented pain relief, decreased need for pain medications, and functional response.
- (9) Current research does not support a routine use of a “series-of-three” injections in either the diagnostic or therapeutic phase. We recommend no more than 2 ESI injections for the initial phase and rarely more than 2 for therapeutic treatment.
- (10) It is currently not recommended to perform epidural blocks on the same day of treatment as facet blocks or sacroiliac blocks or lumbar sympathetic blocks or trigger point injections as this may lead to improper diagnosis or unnecessary treatment.
- (11) Cervical and lumbar epidural steroid injection should not be performed on the same day. (Doing both injections on the same day could result in an excessive dose of steroids, which can be dangerous, and not worth the risk for a treatment that has no long-term benefit.)