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NOTICE OF INDEPENDENT REVIEW DECISION

DATE OF REVIEW: May/27/2011

IRO CASE #:

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE:

L5-S1 Epidural steroid injection of the lumbar spine

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

Office note, 10/25/10

Office Visit, Dr. 03/04/11

Peer Review, Dr. 03/16/11

Peer Review, Dr. 04/07/11

Official Disability Guidelines Treatment in Worker's Comp, 16th edition, 2011 Updates, Low Back Chapter – ESI

PATIENT CLINICAL HISTORY SUMMARY

The claimant is a male who developed low back and left leg pain after swinging sledgehammer on xx/xx/xx. His current diagnoses include lumbar radiculopathy and a herniated lumbar disc. An MRI of the lumbar spine on 01/05/11 revealed diminished signal in the disc indicating desiccation, a small amount of soft tissue in the anterior spinal canal in the midline and extending into the bilateral paracentral regions indicating a small approximate 3.5 millimeter broad-based subligamentous posterior central disc protrusion without evidence of significant spinal canal or neural foramen stenosis.

The claimant treated with therapy and medications. On 03/04/11 he complained of low back pain with numbness, tingling and weakness in the left leg, a tingling in his lower abdomen resulting in frequent bowel movements and difficulty emptying his bladder. He also reported occasional pain to the right leg. The examination showed normal strength and sensation. Deep tendon reflexes were hypoactive without long-tract signs. Straight leg raise reproduced radiculopathy bilaterally, greater on the left. Requests for an L5-S1 lumbar epidural steroid injection were denied on 03/16/11 and 04/07/11.

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

The request for L5-S1 Epidural steroid injection of the lumbar spine is not medically necessary based on the records provided in this case. According to the Official Disability Guidelines, epidural corticosteroid injections are indicated in cases where radiculopathy is documented by physical examination and/or electrodiagnostic testing. In this case there is no convincing evidence of radiculopathy by physical examination. The MRI in this case does not document any spinal canal or neural foraminal stenosis. Therefore based on the Official Disability Guidelines, L5-S1 Epidural steroid injection of the lumbar spine would not be considered medically necessary in this case.

Official Disability Guidelines Treatment in Worker's Comp, 16th edition, 2011 Updates, Low Back Chapter – ESI

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, reduction of medication use 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. Radiculopathy must be corroborated by imaging studies and/or electrodiagnostic testing

(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 supported. This is generally referred to as the “therapeutic phase.” Indications for repeat blocks include acute exacerbation of pain, or new onset of radicular 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.)

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)