



**MEDICAL EVALUATORS
OF TEXAS** ASO, LLC.

2211 West 34th St. • Houston, TX 77018
800-845-8982 FAX: 713-583-5943

Notice of Independent Review Decision

DATE OF REVIEW: October 22, 2014

IRO CASE #:

DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICE OR SERVICES IN DISPUTE

Work Hardening Program 09/04/2014 to 09/18/2014

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

This case was reviewed by a physician who holds a board certification in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and is currently licensed and practicing in the state of Texas.

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)

EMPLOYEE CLINICAL HISTORY [SUMMARY]:

The patient is a female who sustained a work-related injury on xx/xx/xx due to repetitive trauma causing injury to her right wrist and shoulder. The patient stated that she developed numbness in the fingers and wrists over time. The current diagnosis includes carpal tunnel syndrome and right shoulder sprain. The patient had an EMG/NCV study performed on 07/30/2014 that revealed no cervical radiculopathy and was considered a normal study. She also had an initial behavioral medical evaluation on 08/27/2014 showing she had minimal depression and anxiety. She has attended physical therapy. The patient had a functional capacity evaluation performed on 08/20/2014 that revealed her physical demand level was at light, and her job requirements are for a heavy classification. She was reported to have decreased strength in the right hand compared to the left and had shoulder pain during lifting tests. Her treating provider requested a Work Conditioning Program, 80 hours.



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The carrier has denied the request for 80 hours of a Work Hardening program to the right shoulder and wrist as the medical necessity has not been established for this patient under the ODG Guidelines. There should be an evidence of treatment with an adequate trial of active physical rehabilitation with improvement followed by plateau, which has not been provided in the records submitted. Therefore, the request is not medically necessary.

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

The medical records reflect the claimant is a female who sustained a work injury on xx/xx/xx. She was performing her job duties when her right shoulder, hands and fingers started to hurt. The claimant has been treated with physical therapy x 7 sessions and medications. There is a request for a work conditioning program x 80 hours. This claimant has had psychological clearance and has undergone a Functional Capacity Evaluation, which showed she was working at a light PDL.

Regarding the request for a work conditioning program x 80 sessions, ODG notes that Suggested Timelines: 10 visits over 4 weeks, equivalent to up to 30 hours. There is an absence in documentation noting a specific defined return-to-work goal or job plan has been established, communicated and documented. The ideal situation is that there is a plan agreed to by the employer and employee. The work goal to which the employee should return must have demands that exceed the claimant's current validated abilities. Additionally, his request exceeds current treatment guidelines and there are no extenuating circumstances documented to support providing 80 hours of a work conditioning program when ODG supports at the most 30 hours. Therefore, the medical necessity of this request is not reasonable or medically indicated.

ODG – Pain and Shoulder Chapter - (Acute and Chronic)

Criteria for admission to a Work Hardening (WH) Program:

- (1) Prescription: The program has been recommended by a physician or nurse case manager, and a prescription has been provided.
- (2) Screening Documentation: Approval of the program should include evidence of a screening evaluation. This multidisciplinary examination should include the following components: (a) History including demographic information, date and description of injury, history of previous injury, diagnosis/diagnoses, work status before the injury, work status after the injury, history of treatment for the injury (including medications), history of previous injury, current employability, future employability, and time off work; (b) Review of systems including other non work-related medical conditions; (c) Documentation of musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, vocational, motivational, behavioral, and cognitive status by a physician, chiropractor, or physical and/or occupational therapist (and/or assistants); (d) Diagnostic interview with a mental health provider; (e) Determination of safety issues and accommodation at the place of work injury. Screening should include adequate



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testing to determine if the patient has attitudinal and/or behavioral issues that are appropriately addressed in a multidisciplinary work hardening program. The testing should also be intensive enough to provide evidence that there are no psychosocial or significant pain behaviors that should be addressed in other types of programs, or will likely prevent successful participation and return-to-employment after completion of a work hardening program. Development of the patient's program should reflect this assessment.

(3) Job demands: A work-related musculoskeletal deficit has been identified with the addition of evidence of physical, functional, behavioral, and/or vocational deficits that preclude ability to safely achieve current job demands. These job demands are generally reported in the medium or higher demand level (i.e., not clerical/sedentary work). There should generally be evidence of a valid mismatch between documented, specific essential job tasks and the patient's ability to perform these required tasks (as limited by the work injury and associated deficits).

(4) Functional capacity evaluations (FCEs): A valid FCE should be performed, administered and interpreted by a licensed medical professional. The results should indicate consistency with maximal effort, and demonstrate capacities below an employer verified physical demands analysis (PDA). Inconsistencies and/or indication that the patient has performed below maximal effort should be addressed prior to treatment in these programs.

(5) Previous PT: There is evidence of treatment with an adequate trial of active physical rehabilitation with improvement followed by plateau, with evidence of no likely benefit from continuation of this previous treatment. Passive physical medicine modalities are not indicated for use in any of these approaches.

(6) Rule out surgery: The patient is not a candidate for whom surgery, injections, or other treatments would clearly be warranted to improve function (including further diagnostic evaluation in anticipation of surgery).

(7) Healing: Physical and medical recovery sufficient to allow for progressive reactivation and participation for a minimum of 4 hours a day for three to five days a week.

(8) Other contraindications: There is no evidence of other medical, behavioral, or other comorbid conditions (including those that are non work-related) that prohibits participation in the program or contradicts successful return-to-work upon program completion.

(9) RTW plan: A specific defined return-to-work goal or job plan has been established, communicated and documented. The ideal situation is that there is a plan agreed to by the employer and employee. The work goal to which the employee should return must have demands that exceed the claimant's current validated abilities.

(10) Drug problems: There should be documentation that the claimant's medication regimen will not prohibit them from returning to work (either at their previous job or new employment). If this is the case, other treatment options may be required, for example a program focused on detoxification.

(11) Program documentation: The assessment and resultant treatment should be documented and be available to the employer, insurer, and other providers. There should be documentation of the proposed benefit from the program (including functional, vocational, and psychological improvements) and the plans to undertake this improvement. The



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assessment should indicate that the program providers are familiar with the expectations of the planned job, including skills necessary. Evidence of this may include site visitation, videotapes or functional job descriptions.

(12) Further mental health evaluation: Based on the initial screening, further evaluation by a mental health professional may be recommended. The results of this evaluation may suggest that treatment options other than these approaches may be required, and all screening evaluation information should be documented prior to further treatment planning.

(13) Supervision: Supervision is recommended under a physician, chiropractor, occupational therapist, or physical therapist with the appropriate education, training and experience. This clinician should provide on-site supervision of daily activities, and participate in the initial and final evaluations. They should design the treatment plan and be in charge of changes required. They are also in charge of direction of the staff.

(14) Trial: Treatment is not supported for longer than 1-2 weeks without evidence of patient compliance and demonstrated significant gains as documented by subjective and objective improvement in functional abilities. Outcomes should be presented that reflect the goals proposed upon entry, including those specifically addressing deficits identified in the screening procedure. A summary of the patient's physical and functional activities performed in the program should be included as an assessment of progress.

(15) Concurrently working: The patient who has been released to work with specific restrictions may participate in the program while concurrently working in a restricted capacity, but the total number of daily hours should not exceed 8 per day while in treatment.

(16) Conferences: There should be evidence of routine staff conferencing regarding progress and plans for discharge. Daily treatment activity and response should be documented.

(17) Voc rehab: Vocational consultation should be available if this is indicated as a significant barrier. This would be required if the patient has no job to return to.

(18) Post-injury cap: 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 generally do not improve from intensive work hardening programs. If the worker is greater than one-year post injury a comprehensive multidisciplinary program may be warranted if there is clinical suggestion of psychological barrier to recovery (but these more complex programs may also be justified as early as 8-12 weeks, see Chronic pain programs).

(19) Program timelines: These approaches are highly variable in intensity, frequency and duration. APTA, AOTA and utilization guidelines for individual jurisdictions may be inconsistent. In general, the recommendations for use of such programs will fall within the following ranges: These approaches are necessarily intensive with highly variable treatment days ranging from 4-8 hours with treatment ranging from 3-5 visits per week. The entirety of this treatment should not exceed 20 full-day visits over 4 weeks, or no more than 160 hours (allowing for part-day sessions if required by part-time work, etc., over a longer number of weeks). A reassessment after 1-2 weeks should be made to



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determine whether completion of the chosen approach is appropriate, or whether treatment of greater intensity is required.

(20) Discharge documentation: At the time of discharge the referral source and other predetermined entities should be notified. This may include the employer and the insurer. There should be evidence documented of the clinical and functional status, recommendations for return to work, and recommendations for follow-up services. Patient attendance and progress should be documented including the reason(s) for termination including successful program completion or failure. This would include noncompliance, declining further services, or limited potential to benefit. There should also be documentation if the patient is unable to participate due to underlying medical conditions including substance dependence.

(21) Repetition: Upon completion of a rehabilitation program (e.g., work conditioning, work hardening, outpatient medical rehabilitation, or chronic pain/functional restoration program) neither re-enrollment in nor repetition of the same or similar rehabilitation program is medically warranted for the same condition or injury.

ODG Work Conditioning (WC) Physical Therapy Guidelines

WC amounts to an additional series of intensive physical therapy (PT) visits required beyond a normal course of PT, primarily for exercise training/supervision (and would be contraindicated if there are already significant psychosocial, drug or attitudinal barriers to recovery not addressed by these programs). See also Physical therapy for general PT guidelines. WC visits will typically be more intensive than regular PT visits, lasting 2 or 3 times as long. And, as with all physical therapy programs, Work Conditioning participation does not preclude concurrently being at work.

Timelines: 10 visits over 4 weeks, equivalent to up to 30 hours.



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

- ACOEM- AMERICAN 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)