

MEDICAL CONTESTED CASE HEARING NO. 11145
M6-11-32470-01

DECISION AND ORDER

This case is decided pursuant to Chapter 410 of the Texas Workers' Compensation Act and Rules of the Division of Workers' Compensation adopted thereunder.

ISSUES

A contested case hearing was held on May 19, 2011 to decide the following disputed issue:

Is the preponderance of the evidence contrary to the decision of the Independent Review Organization (IRO) that Claimant is entitled to attend a chronic pain management program five days a week for two weeks for the compensable injury of (Date of Injury)?

PARTIES PRESENT

Petitioner/Carrier appeared and was represented by PM, attorney.

Respondent JF did not appear.

Claimant appeared and was assisted by MV, ombudsman.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On (Date of Injury), Claimant sustained a compensable injury to his lower back when he lifted a box of wax from the floor. The following day, Claimant was seen at the emergency room and diagnosed with a sprain/strain. Claimant was also seen on March 15, 2010 by his treating physician, a chiropractor. Claimant received physical therapy, underwent various diagnostic testing, and was referred to various orthopedists. Surgery has been recommended, but has been declined by the Claimant.

It is undisputed that Claimant's treating physician requested 10 sessions of chronic pain management which was approved by the Carrier. Before the end of the first 10 sessions, the treating physician requested another 10 sessions which were denied by the Carrier and referred to an IRO who overturned the Carrier's denial.

The IRO reviewer, a general and forensic psychiatrist and Board Certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, concluded that the requested additional sessions appeared reasonable. The reviewer noted that the initial program revealed "mixed results with respect to psychological functioning with some measures improving and others mildly worsening. However there was improvement in his global assessment of functioning..." He also noted that

the “Official Disability Guidelines (*ODG*) supports continuation of a chronic pain management program if there are subjective and objective gains.” Claimant subsequently attended the additional 10 sessions of chronic pain management.

Texas Labor Code Section 408.021 provides that an employee who sustains a compensable injury is entitled to all health care reasonably required by the nature of the injury as and when needed. Health care reasonably required is further defined in Texas Labor Code Section 401.011 (22a) as health care that is clinically appropriate and considered effective for the injured employee's injury and provided in accordance with best practices consistent with evidence based medicine or, if evidence based medicine is not available, then generally accepted standards of medical practice recognized in the medical community. Health care under the Texas Workers' Compensation system must be consistent with evidence based medicine if that evidence is available. Evidence based medicine is further defined in Texas Labor Code Section 401.011 (18a) to be the use of the current best quality scientific and medical evidence formulated from credible scientific studies, including peer-reviewed medical literature and other current scientifically based texts and treatment and practice guidelines in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The Commissioner of the Division of Workers' Compensation is required to adopt treatment guidelines that are evidence-based, scientifically valid, outcome-focused and designed to reduce excessive or inappropriate medical care while safeguarding necessary medical care. Texas Labor Code Section 413.011(e). Medical services consistent with the medical policies and fee guidelines adopted by the commissioner are presumed reasonable in accordance with Texas Labor Code Section 413.017(1).

In accordance with the above statutory guidance, the Division of Workers' Compensation has adopted treatment guidelines by Division Rule 137.100. This rule directs health care providers to provide treatment in accordance with the current edition of the Official Disability Guidelines (*ODG*), and such treatment is presumed to be health care reasonably required as defined in the Texas Labor Code. Thus, the focus of any health care dispute starts with the health care set out in the *ODG*. Also, in accordance with Division Rule 133.308 (t), "A decision issued by an IRO is not considered an agency decision and neither the Department nor the Division are considered parties to an appeal. In a Contested Case Hearing (CCH), the party appealing the IRO decision has the burden of overcoming the decision issued by an IRO by a preponderance of evidence-based medical evidence."

The *ODG* recognizes the use of chronic pain management as a course of treatment and states as follows:

Criteria for the general use of multidisciplinary pain management programs:
Outpatient pain rehabilitation programs may be considered medically necessary in the following circumstances:

(1) The patient has a chronic pain syndrome, with evidence of loss of function that persists beyond three months and has evidence of three or more of the following: (a) Excessive dependence on health-care providers, spouse, or family; (b) Secondary physical deconditioning due to disuse and/or fear-avoidance of physical activity due to pain; (c) Withdrawal from social activities or normal contact with others, including work, recreation, or other social contacts; (d) Failure to restore preinjury function after a period of disability such that the physical capacity is insufficient to pursue work, family, or recreational needs; (e) Development of psychosocial sequelae that limits function or recovery after the initial incident, including anxiety, fear-avoidance, depression, sleep disorders, or nonorganic illness behaviors (with a reasonable probability to respond to treatment intervention); (f) The diagnosis is not primarily a personality disorder or psychological condition without a physical component; (g) There is evidence of continued use of prescription pain medications (particularly those that may result in tolerance, dependence or abuse) without evidence of improvement in pain or function.

(2) Previous methods of treating chronic pain have been unsuccessful and there is an absence of other options likely to result in significant clinical improvement.

(3) An adequate and thorough multidisciplinary evaluation has been made. This should include pertinent validated diagnostic testing that addresses the following:

(a) A physical exam that rules out conditions that require treatment prior to initiating the program. All diagnostic procedures necessary to rule out treatable pathology, including imaging studies and invasive injections (used for diagnosis), should be completed prior to considering a patient a candidate for a program. The exception is diagnostic procedures that were repeatedly requested and not authorized. Although the primary emphasis is on the work-related injury, underlying non-work related pathology that contributes to pain and decreased function may need to be addressed and treated by a primary care physician prior to or coincident to starting treatment; (b) Evidence of a screening evaluation should be provided when addiction is present or strongly suspected; (c) Psychological testing using a validated instrument to identify pertinent areas that need to be addressed in the program (including but not limited to mood disorder, sleep disorder, relationship dysfunction, distorted beliefs about pain and disability, coping skills and/or locus of control regarding pain and medical care) or diagnoses that would better be addressed using other treatment should be performed; (d) An evaluation of social and vocational issues that require assessment.

(4) If a goal of treatment is to prevent or avoid controversial or optional surgery, a trial of 10 visits (80 hours) may be implemented to assess whether surgery may be avoided.

(5) If a primary reason for treatment in the program is addressing possible substance use issues, an evaluation with an addiction clinician may be indicated upon entering the program to establish the most appropriate treatment approach (pain program vs. substance dependence program). This must address evaluation of drug abuse or diversion (and prescribing drugs in a non-therapeutic manner). In this particular case, once drug abuse or diversion issues are addressed, a 10-day trial may help to establish a diagnosis, and determine if the patient is not better suited for treatment in a substance dependence program. Addiction consultation can be incorporated into a pain program. If there is indication that substance dependence may be a problem, there should be evidence that the program has the capability to address this type of pathology prior to approval.

(6) Once the evaluation is completed, a treatment plan should be presented with specifics for treatment of identified problems, and outcomes that will be followed.

(7) There should be documentation that the patient has motivation to change, and is willing to change their medication regimen (including decreasing or actually weaning substances known for dependence). There should also be some documentation that the patient is aware that successful treatment may change compensation and/or other secondary gains. In questionable cases, an opportunity for a brief treatment trial may improve assessment of patient motivation and/or willingness to decrease habituating medications.

(8) Negative predictors of success (as outlined above) should be identified, and if present, the pre-program goals should indicate how these will be addressed.

(9) If a program is planned for a patient that has been continuously disabled for greater than 24 months, the outcomes for the necessity of use should be clearly identified, as there is conflicting evidence that chronic pain programs provide return-to-work beyond this period. These other desirable types of outcomes include decreasing post-treatment care including medications, injections and surgery. This cautionary statement should not preclude patients off work for over two years from being admitted to a multidisciplinary pain management program with demonstrated positive outcomes in this population.

(10) Treatment is not suggested for longer than 2 weeks without evidence of compliance and significant demonstrated efficacy as documented by subjective and objective gains. (Note: Patients may get worse before they get better. For example, objective gains may be moving joints that are stiff from lack of use, resulting in increased subjective pain.) However, it is also not suggested that a continuous course of treatment be interrupted at two weeks solely to document these gains, if there are preliminary indications that they are being made on a concurrent basis.

(11) Integrative summary reports that include treatment goals, compliance, progress assessment with objective measures and stage of treatment, must be

made available upon request at least on a bi-weekly basis during the course of the treatment program.

(12) Total treatment duration should generally not exceed 20 full-day (160 hours) sessions (or the equivalent in part-day sessions if required by part-time work, transportation, childcare, or comorbidities). (Sanders, 2005) Treatment duration in excess of 160 hours requires a clear rationale for the specified extension and reasonable goals to be achieved. Longer durations require individualized care plans explaining why improvements cannot be achieved without an extension as well as evidence of documented improved outcomes from the facility (particularly in terms of the specific outcomes that are to be addressed).

(13) At the conclusion and subsequently, neither re-enrollment in repetition of the same or similar rehabilitation program (e.g. work hardening, work conditioning, out-patient medical rehabilitation) is medically warranted for the same condition or injury (with possible exception for a medically necessary organized detox program). Prior to entry into a program the evaluation should clearly indicate the necessity for the type of program required, and providers should determine upfront which program their patients would benefit more from. A chronic pain program should not be considered a “stepping stone” after less intensive programs, but prior participation in a work conditioning or work hardening program does not preclude an opportunity for entering a chronic pain program if otherwise indicated.

(14) Suggestions for treatment post-program should be well documented and provided to the referral physician. The patient may require time-limited, less intensive post-treatment with the program itself. Defined goals for these interventions and planned duration should be specified.

(15) Post-treatment medication management is particularly important. Patients that have been identified as having substance abuse issues generally require some sort of continued addiction follow-up to avoid relapse.

Inpatient pain rehabilitation programs: These programs typically consist of more intensive functional rehabilitation and medical care than their outpatient counterparts. They may be appropriate for patients who: (1) don't have the minimal functional capacity to participate effectively in an outpatient program; (2) have medical conditions that require more intensive oversight; (3) are receiving large amounts of medications necessitating medication weaning or detoxification; or (4) have complex medical or psychological diagnosis that benefit from more intensive observation and/or additional consultation during the rehabilitation process. (Keel, 1998) (Kool, 2005) (Buchner, 2006) (Kool, 2007) As with outpatient pain rehabilitation programs, the most effective programs combine intensive, daily biopsychosocial rehabilitation with a functional restoration approach. If a primary focus is drug treatment, the initial evaluation

should attempt to identify the most appropriate treatment plan (a drug treatment /detoxification approach vs. a multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary treatment program). See Chronic pain programs, opioids; Functional restoration programs.

Carrier offered the testimony of Dr. T to rebut the IRO's determination that the additional 10 sessions is healthcare reasonably required for the compensable injury of (Date of Injury). Dr. T provided her extensive medical credentials which were not objected to by the Claimant. Dr. T testified that the second set of 10 sessions of chronic pain management were not medically necessary. She noted that the ODG specifies and requires that there be a showing that the treatment received objectively demonstrated functional improvement. Dr. T opined that that there was no demonstrable improvement shown by Claimant under his treating physician's direction. She noted that the IRO reviewer failed to note the objective evidence to support his statement that Claimant's functions, both physical and mental, had improved under the first set of sessions. She noted that when Claimant came under the direction of his treating physician, Claimant did not have any signs or symptoms of depression or anxiety. Dr. T referred to a medical report dated April 10, 2010. She also explained that as the treatment progressed, Claimant's depression and anxiety levels fluctuated and were inconsistent. She also pointed out that after Claimant's participation of the first 10 sessions of the chronic pain program, Claimant had worsening levels of depression and anxiety as compared to earlier medical reports.

Dr. T also disagreed with the IRO's opinion that Claimant had demonstrated functional improvement. Dr. T explained that one of the criteria set out requires a showing of functional improvement and medical necessity for detoxification. She pointed out that Claimant has had a total of four functional capacity evaluations (FCE). She specifically pointed out that the FCE dated July 12, 2010 noted significant levels of lifting with both the upper and lower extremities. She compared that FCE to one that was taken on March 8, 2011, and explained that the latter FCE indicated that Claimant's lifting capacity in every level had declined and not improved.

She noted that based on these results, the treatment that was being requested, and subsequently underwent, was contrary to what is required under the ODG. She further explained that there were medical records indicating that Claimant was taking medication, but there were no specific records indicating the dosage and name of the medication; nor were there any drug tests to show the levels of the medication ingested by the Claimant. Additionally, she noted that documentation was lacking showing that Claimant was aware that successful treatment may change compensation and/or other secondary gains.

Claimant did not offer any expert testimony to rebut Dr. T's testimony.

The Petitioner/Carrier has shown by a preponderance of evidence-based medical evidence that the requested additional 10 sessions of a chronic pain program is not health care reasonably required for the compensable injury sustained on (Date of Injury).

Even though all the evidence presented was not discussed, it was considered. The Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law are based on all of the evidence presented.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The parties stipulated to the following facts:
 - A. Venue is proper in the (City) Field Office of the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation.
 - B. On (Date of Injury), Claimant was the employee of (Self-Insured), Employer.
 - C. On (Date of Injury), Claimant sustained a compensable injury.
2. Carrier delivered to Claimant a single document stating the true corporate name of Carrier, and the name and street address of Carrier's registered agent, which document was admitted into evidence as Hearing Officer's Exhibit Number 2.
3. The IRO determined that the requested services did meet the criteria set out by the ODG for Claimant to attend an additional 10 sessions of a chronic pain management program.
4. Carrier established that Claimant did not meet all the requirements set out by the ODG allowing him to attend a second session of a chronic pain management program for the compensable injury of (Date of Injury).
5. The preponderance of the evidence-based medical evidence is contrary to the IRO decision.
6. Chronic pain management program five days a week for two weeks is not health care reasonably required for the compensable injury of (Date of Injury).

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation, has jurisdiction to hear this case.
2. Venue is proper in the (City) Field Office.
3. The preponderance of the evidence is contrary to the decision of the IRO that a chronic pain management program five days a week for two weeks is healthcare reasonably required for the compensable injury of (Date of Injury).

DECISION

Claimant is not entitled to attend a chronic pain management program five days a week for two weeks for the compensable injury of (Date of Injury).

ORDER

Carrier is not liable for the benefits at issue in this hearing. Claimant remains entitled to medical benefits for the compensable injury in accordance with §408.021.

The true corporate name of the insurance carrier is **(SELF-INSURED)**, and the name and address of its registered agent for service of process is

(SELF-INSURED)
(STREET ADDRESS)
(CITY), TX (ZIP CODE)

Signed this 3rd day of June, 2011.

Teresa G. Hartley
Hearing Officer