MEDICAL CONTESTED CASE HEARING NO. 11112
M6-11-30587-01

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 February 16, 2011 to decide the following disputed issue:

1. Is the preponderance of the evidence contrary to the decision of the IRO that the claimant is entitled to eighty hours of an initial chronic pain management program for the compensable injury of _____?

PARTIES PRESENT

Petitioner/Self-Insured Carrier appeared and was represented by ST, attorney.
Claimant appeared and was represented by WP, attorney. The Respondent, Dr. M, was not present, but the Claimant presented evidence on his behalf.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Claimant was employed as a stocker for the claim employer. Claimant sustained injuries to his left shoulder and lumbar spine when he lifted a forty pound bag of gravel on _____. Claimant received physical therapy, medications, and injections for his left shoulder and lumbar spine. Claimant underwent a left shoulder arthroscopic surgery on January 6, 2010. Claimant also briefly participated in a work hardening program. The program was discontinued by his treating doctor, Dr. M, because he did not feel that the Claimant was making adequate progress in the program.

According to the medical records in evidence, Claimant continued to experience chronic pain, depression, and functional deficits. Dr. M recommended that Claimant participate in a chronic pain management program because Claimant had exhausted all other treatments. Dr. M also indicated that the pain management was necessary to allow Claimant to be more functional while dealing with pain on a daily basis. Dr. M requested eighty hours of an initial chronic pain management program. The doctor's request was denied twice by the Self-Insured Carrier's Utilization Review Agents. Dr. M appealed the Carrier's denial to an IRO. The IRO, relying on the ODG and medical judgment, overturned the Self-Insured Carrier's previous adverse determinations.

DISCUSSION

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 cites the criteria for the general use of multidisciplinary pain management programs, including chronic pain management programs, and provides 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."

The IRO, a board certified neurologist with added qualifications in pain management, provided a summary of the information contained in the medical records and the following analysis and explanation of its decision:

> "Though this was initially denied by other reviewers, upon review of the records I do feel that this Claimant has undergone initial treatment attempts that have not resulted in adequate progress, both from a pain control standpoint and also from various psychological consequences from his chronic pain and failure to return to work, etc. Therefore, I do feel that it is reasonable and medically necessary for this Claimant to be given the benefits that a chronic multidisciplinary pain program may offer as the next step in treatment."

Claimant argued that he met the ODG criteria for the recommended chronic pain management program, and relied on his medical records and the decision of the IRO to support his position. The medical records from the respondent, Dr. M, were also in evidence. After he and DT, LPC, evaluated Claimant and a Functional Capacity Evaluation was performed, Dr. M recommended that Claimant undergo a chronic pain management program. In both his initial request dated September 3, 2010 and his request for reconsideration dated September 20, 2010, Dr. M outlined several reasons why Claimant was an appropriate candidate for a chronic pain management program. Dr. M's reports indicate that he made the recommendation because Claimant met multiple criteria for chronic pain management that are found in the ODG. Dr. M's report lists eleven different factors that Claimant met and his reports are substantiated by the medical evidence presented and the ODG.

Self-Insured Carrier contended that Claimant did not meet the ODG criteria for the recommended chronic pain management program, and relied on the testimony of Dr. G, M.D. Dr. G testified that he was board certified in occupational medicine, and disagreed with the determination of the IRO. Dr. G stated that he had reviewed Claimant's medical records. Based on his review and interpretation of Claimant's medical records, Dr. G opined that Claimant did not meet the ODG criteria for a chronic pain management program because the Claimant had already participated in a work hardening program. However, he also testified that the ODG did not preclude participation in a pain management program after participation in a work hardening program.

Although he acknowledged that Claimant met some of the criteria for participation in a pain management program, including at least three of the factors listed in the first criteria for general use of multidisciplinary pain management programs, Dr. G did not believe that the program was a reasonably necessary treatment for Claimant. Claimant's treating doctor and the IRO physician

reviewer relied on the ODG and their professional judgment in recommending that Claimant undergo the pain management program.

After reviewing all of the evidence, the preponderance of the evidence is not contrary to the decision of the IRO. Although the Self-Insured Carrier did present evidence-based medical evidence to support its position, it was not sufficient enough to overcome the IRO determination by a preponderance of the evidence. Dr. G and the IRO both relied on the ODG to make their determination regarding the need for chronic pain management. However, Dr. G's testimony did not persuasively establish that Claimant did not meet the criteria for the chronic pain management program.

When all of the evidence was reviewed, the IRO's decision was supported by a preponderance of evidence-based medical evidence. Therefore, the decision of the IRO is upheld. Claimant is entitled to eighty hours of an initial chronic pain management program for the compensable injury of _____.

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. Venue is proper in the (City) City Field Office of the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation.

2. On _____, Claimant was the employee of (Self-Insured), Employer.

3. Claimant sustained a compensable injury on _____.

4. The IRO determined that Claimant is entitled to eighty hours of an initial chronic pain management program for the compensable injury of _____.

5. Self-Insured Carrier delivered to Claimant a single document stating the true corporate name of Self-Insured Carrier, and the name and street address of Self-Insured Carrier's registered agent, which document was admitted into evidence as Hearing Officer's Exhibit Number 2.

6. The evidence presented by Self-Insured Carrier was not sufficient to overcome the decision of the IRO by a preponderance of evidence-based medical evidence.

7. Eighty hours of an initial chronic pain management program is health care reasonably required for the compensable injury of _____.

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 not contrary to the decision of the IRO that eighty hours of an initial chronic pain management program is health care reasonably required for the compensable injury of _____.

DECISION

Claimant is entitled to eighty hours of an initial chronic pain management program for the compensable injury of _____.

ORDER

Self-Insured Carrier is 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), TEXAS (ZIP CODE)

Signed this 25th day of February, 2011.

Jacquelyn Coleman
Hearing Officer