



CINCINNATI MEDICINE DIGEST

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Academy secretary and treasurer selected

At its October meeting, the Academy Council selected Thomas Lamarre, Jr., MD, as secretary and Andrew Markiewitz, MD, as treasurer.

This is Dr. Lamarre's fourth year as a member of the Academy Council while Dr. Markiewitz is in his third year of service. In these positions, both become members of the Executive Committee.

Other members of the Executive Committee are President James Sosnowski, MD; President-elect Peter Kambelos, MD; Past President Robyn Chatman, MD; and Academy Executive Director Donna Gilliam.

Academy members are encouraged to contact their elected leaders or the executive director with any concerns or suggestions they might have.



UHC Medicare Advantage terminations cause concern

Physicians in the Cincinnati area, and throughout Ohio, are concerned with United Healthcare's (UHC) decision to terminate physicians from its Medicare Advantage plans. Physician concerns range from significant network adequacy issues for primary care and subspecialty services; access and quality of care; UHC's communications to both physicians and patients regarding the terminations; and the appeal process to be re-instated.

Because of the statewide impact of this issue, the Ohio State Medical Association has met with representatives of UHC to press for reasons behind UHC's decision to terminate physicians from its Medicare Advantage Plans.

According to Richard Migliori, MD, chief medical officer for UnitedHealth Group, the decision was made at the national level due to what he called "the severe recent under-funding" by the federal government of Medicare Advantage care plans. He furthered stated that it was a "mathematical decision" and that UHC is not trying to reduce the pool of severely ill patients nor targeting physicians for over-utilization. Rather, he claimed that UHC wants to focus on a smaller pool of physicians with larger numbers of UHC Medicare Advantage patients in order to continue offering the plans across Ohio. He stated in the initial conversation that UHC's Star System for quality and efficiency was a minor factor in the decisions and only came into play after network adequacy and geography were considered. However, in follow-up clarification from R. Guy Shrake, MD, Ohio medical director for UHC, Dr. Shrake said that "we were talking about the UHC Premium

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Ohio develops new guidelines for prescribing opioids

Two year's ago, Ohio Governor John Kasich formed the Governor's Cabinet Opiate Action Team (GCOAT) to address the state's increase in fatal drug overdoses, which rose from 369 in 1999 to 1,765 in 2011, a 440% increase. Prescription opioids amount for more fatal overdoses than any other prescription or illegal drug, including cocaine, heroin, and hallucinogens combined. Prescription drugs are involved in most of the unintentional drug overdoses, with prescription pain medications (opioids) and multiple drug use the major contributors to this epidemic.

According to Ohio's Opiate Action Team, the safe and appropriate treatment of pain is a priority in Ohio. GCOAT, along with a group of professional health care provider licensing boards, associations, individual providers, and other key stakeholders have focused their most recent efforts on the further education of health care professionals and patients. The goal is to help reduce and eliminate

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The Academy of Medicine of Cincinnati, founded in 1857, is a not-for-profit, professional association for the physicians of Hamilton County, Ohio. The Academy of Medicine is the professional association that exists to organize, represent, advocate for, and serve physicians of Greater Cincinnati.

Visit the Academy of Medicine of Cincinnati online at www.academyofmedicine.org

ACIP/ACOG recommend women receive Tdap vaccine with each pregnancy

The United States, including Greater Cincinnati, has been experiencing an epidemic of Pertussis (Whooping Cough). While Pertussis can affect people at any age, infants under 12 months of age are at highest risk of serious sequelae and even death from the disease. In order to reduce the risk of Pertussis infection in infants, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) have recommended that all women receive a Tetanus-Diphtheria-acellular Pertussis (Tdap) vaccine with each pregnancy.

ACIP and ACOG recommend that women receive the Tdap vaccine between 27 and 36 weeks gestation. This timing allows for maximal maternal antibody response and optimal passive transfer of maternal antibodies to the infant. ACIP review of studies showed no increased short term or long-term side effects to the mother of repeated Tdap immunization. Review also showed no increased short-term or long-term side effects to the infant after maternal Tdap immunization.

ACIP also recommends that adolescents and adults who are in close contact with an infant under 12 months of age also receive one dose of Tdap vaccine if they have not done so previously. The Cincinnati Health Department (CHD) is offering Tdap at its primary care health centers at no charge to fathers, grandparents, family members and others who are in close contact to an infant under 12 months of age. Please call the health centers for more information and vaccination times: Cann (Madisonville)—263-8750; Elm Street—352-3092; Millvale at Hopple—352-3192; Northside—357-7600; Price Hill—357-2700.

(Sources: *MMWR*; February 22, 2013; 62(07), 131-35 and *ACOG Committee Opinion: Update on Immunization and Pregnancy: Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis Vaccination*; June 2013.)

Draft legislation to repeal SGR introduced

On October 30, the Senate Finance and House Ways and Means committees released a bipartisan draft proposal for legislation that “would permanently repeal the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula used to determine physician Medicare payment, reform the fee-for-service (FFS) payment model through greater focus on value over volume, and encourage participation in alternative payment models.” For the full proposal, go to <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=359858>

Unless Congress acts before January 1, 2014, physician payments will be cut by approximately 24%.

The American Medical Association has submitted recommendations to the committees, aimed at building upon and strengthening the draft proposal. To see the recommendations go to www.ama-assn.org/resources/doc/washington/sustainable-growth-rate-discussion-draft-11nov2013.pdf. The AMA plans to continue its advocacy efforts with Congress to shape and advance legislation this year to eliminate the SGR.

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Welcome new members

The Academy Council has approved the following memberships over the past quarter. Practicing physicians are listed with office information. Zip codes beginning with '452' are Cincinnati locations.

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UHC terminations — continued from Page 1

Designation but it is not a minor factor.” He went on to say that “there is no particular formula related to our decisions ... We are actively seeking new ways to enhance health plan quality, improve health care outcomes, and curb the growth in health care costs. One example of how this is being achieved is the movement to a system where physicians, hospitals, and other health care providers that demonstrate the highest quality at the greatest value will be rewarded for their efforts.”

The OSMA relayed the significant areas of concern within the physician community and the negative impact of the terminations in their communities to the UHC representatives. In addition, OSMA has sent a letter to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) citing specific examples of terminations that physicians believe result in questionable network adequacy

standards, and have asked the federal agency to investigate. To view the letter and examples, go to www.osma.org/files/documents/news-articles/letter-to-nicole-edwards-nov-11-2013.pdf.

In addition, the terminations are being seen on a national level. Therefore, the American Medical Association, along with 81 state and specialty societies, also sent a letter to CMS urging the agency to take immediate action to ensure that beneficiaries participating in Medicare Advantage plans have accurate, reliable information to make health insurance elections during the 2014 Open Enrollment period and to address a lack of Medicare Advantage sponsor transparency on network adequacy. According to AMA, hundreds of physicians have been terminated in certain markets from 2014 Medicare Advantage plan networks “without cause.” AMA went on to say that the timing and pro-

cess used to communicate the terminations and modifications to the networks are inconsistent with CMS guidelines and regulations. To see AMA’s letter to CMS, go to www.ama-assn.org/resources/doc/washington/medicare-advantage-transparency-sign-on-letter-06nov2013.pdf.

What can terminated physicians do?

- Appeal the termination — In the termination letter to physicians, UHC provided instructions on how to appeal the decision. It has been reported by a large majority of physicians who have followed the appeal process that they received an appeal denial within 48 hours. Still it is recommended that physicians file a formal appeal and include information on the uniqueness of your specialty/subspecialty; the uniqueness of your patient base, e.g., patients that no one else can/will treat; number of UHC Medicare patients; and travel time for those patients to see a physician of similar expertise.

- Contact your patients — Let them know that you have been terminated by UHC without cause (some patients have reported receiving information from UHC that the physician had dropped out of the plan) and will no longer be a part of the network, which means the patient will not receive network reimbursement for medical services. You can suggest that the patient contact UHC directly. You can also inform patients of the networks in which you currently participate. Physicians should also note the Medicare open enrollment period and that patients have the ability to review coverage and make changes.

- Recommend patients contact the Ohio Department of Insurance — The ODI is a consumer watchdog organization that investigates complaints of insurance companies, including health insurers. Go to www.insurance.ohio.gov/Consumer/OCS/Pages/ConsCompl.aspx for more information including a complaint form.

- Contact your Ohio congressional leaders to let them know how these terminations affect their constituents.

If you have questions or feel that your termination will have a negative impact on patients in our area, contact Academy Executive Director Donna Gilliam, 513-421-7010, ext. 308 or dgilliam@academyofmedicine.org.

New members — continued from page 4

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New opioid prescribing guidelines — continued from Page 1

the misuse and abuse of opioid drugs in Ohio. The message is the same for other controlled substances and the prescription drug tramadol that have similar misuse and abuse potential. Therefore, GCOAT is asking physicians to institute the following guidelines in their practices.

Guidelines for Prescribing Opioids for the Treatment of Chronic, Non-Terminal Pain 80 mg of a Morphine Equivalent Daily Dose (MED) “Trigger Point”

These guidelines address the use of opioids for the treatment of chronic, non-terminal pain. “Chronic pain” means pain that has persisted after reasonable medical efforts have been made to relieve the pain or cure its cause and that has continued, either continuously or episodically, for longer than three continuous months. The guidelines are intended to help health care providers review and assess their approach in the prescribing of opioids. The guidelines are points of reference intended to supplement and not replace the individual prescriber’s clinical judgment. The 80 mg MED is the maximum daily dose at which point the prescriber’s actions are triggered; however, this 80 mg MED trigger point is not an endorsement by any regulatory body or medical professional to utilize that dose or greater.

Recent analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that “patients with mental health and substance use disorders are at increased risk for nonmedical use and overdose from prescription painkillers as well as being prescribed high doses of these drugs.” Drug overdose deaths increased for the 11th consecutive year in 2010. Nearly 60% of the deaths involved pharmaceuticals, and opioids were involved in nearly 75%. Researchers also found that drugs prescribed for mental health conditions were involved in over half. These findings appear consistent with research previously published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* that concluded that “patients receiving higher doses of prescribed opioids are at an increased risk for overdose, which underscores the need

for close supervision of these patients” (Dunn, et al., 2010).

Health care providers are not obligated to use opioids when a favorable risk-benefit balance cannot be documented. Providers should first consider non-pharmacologic and non-opioid therapies. Providers should exercise the same caution with tramadol as with opioids and must take into account the medication’s potential for abuse, the possibility the patient will obtain the medication for a nontherapeutic use or distribute it to other persons, and the potential existence of an illicit market for the medication.

Providers must be vigilant to the wide range of potential adverse effects associated with long-term opioid therapy and misuse of extended-release formulations. That vigilance and detailed attention has to be present from the outset of prescribing and continue for the duration of treatment. Providers should avoid starting a patient on long-term opioid therapy when treating chronic pain. Providers should also avoid prescribing benzodiazepines with opioids as it may increase opioid toxicity, add to sleep apnea risk, and increase risk of overdose deaths and other potential adverse effects.

Providers can further minimize the potential for prescription drug abuse/misuse and help reduce the number of unintentional overdose deaths associated with pain medications by recognizing times to “press pause” in response to certain “trigger points.” This pause allows providers to reassess their compliance with accepted and prevailing standards of care. The 80 mg Morphine Equivalent Daily Dose (MED) “trigger point” is one such time.

Providers treating chronic, non-terminal pain patients who have received opioids equal to or greater than 80 mg MED for longer than three continuous months should strongly consider doing the following to optimize therapy and help ensure patient safety:

- Reestablish informed consent, including providing the patient with written information on the potential adverse effects of long-term opioid therapy.
- Review the patient’s functional status and documentation, including

the 4A’s of chronic pain treatment — Activities of daily living, Adverse effects, Analgesia; and Aberrant behavior.

- Review the patient’s progress toward treatment objectives for the duration of treatment.
- Utilize OARRS as an additional check on patient compliance.
- Consider a patient pain treatment agreement that may include: more frequent office visits, different treatment options, drug screens, use of one pharmacy, use of one provider for the prescription of pain medications, and consequences for non-compliance with terms of the agreement.
- Reconsider having the patient evaluated by one or more other providers who specialize in the treatment of the area, system, or organ of the body perceived as the source of the pain.

The 80 mg MED “trigger point” is an opportunity to review the plan of treatment, the patient’s response to treatment, and any modification to the plan of treatment that is necessary to achieve a favorable risk-benefit balance for the patient’s care. If opioid therapy is continued, further reassessment will be guided by clinical judgment and decision-making consistent with accepted and prevailing standards of care. The “trigger point” also provides an opportunity to further assess addiction risk or mental health concerns, possibly using Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) tools, including referral to an addiction medicine specialist when appropriate.

For providers treating acute exacerbation of chronic, non-terminal pain, clinical judgment may not trigger the need for using the full array of reassessment tools.

Providers treating patients with acute care conditions in the emergency department or urgent care center should refer to the Ohio Emergency and Acute Care Facility Opioids and Other Controlled Substances Prescribing Guidelines.

For more information, go to www.med.ohio.gov/webhost/ooat.html.



