

UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage Network Changes in Colorado

The Colorado Medical Society was advised by representatives of UnitedHealthcare (UHC) that some physicians may be receiving notices discontinuing their participation in UnitedHealthcare's Medicare Advantage network, effective September 15, 2014.

Specific to Colorado:

- These changes will impact a small number of physicians – less than 1% of the existing 7,600+ network of participating physicians, primarily PCPs.
- The notifications to physicians and Medicare Advantage members will occur in advance of the annual Medicare open enrollment period this fall.
 - Letters and contract amendments were mailed recently to physicians who have been de-selected, and letters to impacted Medicare members will be mailed in the coming weeks.

UHC advised that the physicians affected have a relatively small number of UHC Medicare Advantage patients in their practices. UHC must maintain access for their members so as part of their network restructuring they tried to ensure that there would still be a sufficient number of physicians in the same area who could care for their Medicare Advantage members. However, there is an appeal process for the termination. If you don't feel UHC followed the terms of your agreement or if there is additional information regarding your practice that you think is important to this decision you are encouraged to submit an appeal.

- Appeal the decision immediately, following the instructions in your notice and using the 800 number listed in the notice to confirm that your appeal request is received and recorded.
- In your appeal submission, include any relevant information that UHC should consider, such as:
 - If you are practicing as a sub-specialist that may not be captured in their records; or
 - If you are providing a particular service that is not provided by another practice in your area.
- Medicare Advantage members can request continuation of ongoing medical treatment or therapies with their current providers. If they qualify they may continue to receive covered services for a short period of time.
 - The procedures for filing such a request will be explained in the letter they receive from UnitedHealthcare, or they can call the customer service number on the back of the ID card.
 - UnitedHealthcare reviews the request in consultation with the member and treating physician and makes a determination based on the medical information submitted by the physician.
 - Once a determination has been made, UnitedHealthcare will notify the member or their representative by phone and will send written confirmation to the member and the treating physician.

During the discussion, Dr. Robert Beauchamp, Sr. Market Medical Director for Colorado, indicated that UHC needed to focus its network so that it could work more closely with participating physicians to improve the quality and outcomes for its Medicare Advantage members. Dr. Beauchamp referenced that payment rates for Medicare Advantage plans have been under pressure, and overall funding is not keeping pace with the growth in health care costs. In addition, he reinforced that these changes are in keeping with the need to improve the quality of Medicare Advantage plans, as measured by the Star Ratings system. Dr. Beauchamp will be discussing the network restructuring with the members of the CMS/UHC Physician Advisory Committee at their July 1 meeting, but wanted to notify CMS in advance of the termination letters being sent out.

Any impacted physician with questions concerning these changes is encouraged to contact their local network representative or UnitedHealthcare's provider call center at provider call center at 1-800-509-3023.