

SPRING 2020

ACQA ADVISOR

ACQA Advisor is a quarterly newsletter dedicated to sharing news, updates and best practices with our ACQA partners.

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We will make it through this crisis TOGETHER

It has been remarkable to witness the fortitude and tenacity that all of you have shown in meeting the challenges associated with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which has had a tremendous impact on your patients, the provider community, and the overall health system.

My role at Excellus BlueCross BlueShield and as a physician has given me insight into the sacrifices many providers have faced, as well as the risk they are taking every day as they care for their patients. These are truly unprecedented times in both scope and severity – times we most likely would never have expected to experience when we recited the Hippocratic Oath upon graduating from medical school.

As I reflect on that oath, I feel that it represents all that we hold dear as we care for your patients who are our members. The following excerpts are particularly meaningful to me. I hope that they bring you solace in these troubled times.

I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.

I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty. Above all, I must not play at God.

I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.

Please know that you are not alone. As a Health Plan, we are doing our best to help you navigate this storm. Our commitment to you and all that you are doing for our community remains a top priority.

We hope that you are finding our COVID-19 updates, educational sessions, telehealth instruction, and coding/billing advice helpful. Please remember that our COVID-19 microsite at

Provider.ExcellusBCBS.com/coronavirus is your most up-to-date source of information as you conduct your daily business with us.

Excellus BCBS also continues to collaborate with you to support member outreach as we gain deeper understanding of each other's resources and other community efforts. For example, our coordination of call lists for high-risk, high-need members has proven beneficial to all.

We know that there is much more to be done and we continue to seek ways to improve our assistance to you during this crisis and beyond.

It is understandable that you likely have concerns about what can be accomplished this year in terms of quality and related incentive programs, such as:

1. Quality scores for Hospital Performance Incentive Program (HPIP)/Rewarding Physician Excellence
2. Quality scores for ACQA

Success in these value-based arrangements will not only be measured by how we get through this year, but how well we are

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positioned to meet the challenges in the post-COVID world. We realize that work will be needed to determine a new version of success.

We've made some immediate changes to reporting requirements for our HPIP program to support providers by following consistent direction as provided by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. We also are waiving the data submission requirement from January 1, 2020 through June 30, 2020, in measuring outcomes for the 2020 HPIP program.

We will continue to evaluate and access quality measures reporting and impact to each of our value-based partners.

I am confident that our existing relationships allow us to build upon our past successes and weather this storm. As always, your opinions and suggestions are welcome.



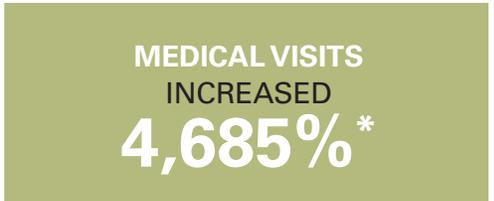
Health care visits delivered via telehealth have grown nearly 2,212 percent* in the past year in part due to upstate New Yorkers practicing social distancing and health care providers focusing on protecting patients and health care workers. A general increase in awareness of telehealth services also has contributed to the increase.

Excellus BlueCross BlueShield claims data from first quarter 2019 to first quarter 2020 shows that telehealth services being delivered accounted for the following:

Clinical Concept Mapping Process Update

Excellus BlueCross BlueShield completed an audit process recently in collaboration with Arcadia Solutions, LLC., an independent company, to onfirm appropriate and accurate mapping of clinical terms to quality measures. This process is part of the due diligence that Excellus BCBS conducts to help ensure valid measurement of performance. Findings of the 2019 audit resulted in minimal impact to performance.

Planning for 2020 audit is under way and expected to take place in the second quarter.



Many area medical practices now offer telehealth. Our members are advised to first check with their primary care physician, and then with the Health Plan.

Among the top specialties using telehealth technology from January 1, 2020 through April 10, 2020:



- Family Medicine
- Internal Medicine
- Licensed Clinical Social Work
- Psychology
- Pediatrics
- Psychiatry
- Mental Health Counseling
- Obstetrics and Gynecology
- Gastroenterology
- Dermatology

Federal regulations pertaining to telehealth continue to change rapidly due to novel coronavirus (COVID-19) developments. We encourage you to visit our COVID-19 Information and Resources page for health plan updates Provider.ExcellusBCBS.com/coronavirus. If you have questions, please reach out to your Provider Relations representative.

*This data excludes visits conducted via the Excellus Health Plan Telemedicine Program with MDLIVE.



90-Day Supplies

can Reduce Rx Costs,
Improve Medication Access Adherence

It's often assumed that filling 90-day supplies of prescription medications increases health plan waste and reduces shared savings in value-based partnerships. In most scenarios, this is not true.

There are several cost-savings advantages to prescribing 90-day supplies when patients are stabilized on maintenance medications, most notably improved medication adherence and reduced dispensing fees. This can help translate to partnership savings, especially when managing chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol.

Prescribing 90-day supplies of maintenance medications for patients stabilized on drug therapy helps provide enough medication to have on hand for travel or unexpected events and results in fewer trips to the pharmacy. By increasing supplies from 30 to 90-days, studies suggest that medication adherence improves by up to 20 percent.²

Adherence rates can have a profound impact on a patient's total cost of care, as medication nonadherence has been found to be a significant contributor to avoidable health care costs across the nation. Studies show non-adherent patients are 44 percent more likely to be hospitalized and 32 percent more likely to visit the emergency department, indicating a bulk of the financial impact can be captured throughout our hospital systems.¹

Prescribing 90-day supplies for patients who are stabilized on maintenance medications can also reduce unseen costs in value-based arrangements. When 90-day supplies are dispensed, pharmacy rates are generally deeper, and the number of dispensing fees is reduced. If a patient fills 12 30-day prescriptions, there are 12 pharmacy dispensing fees per year. Alternately, there are only four dispensing fees if a 90-day supply is dispensed. Using a mail service pharmacy can help drive additional savings and lower out-of-pocket patient costs.

While benefit design can vary by contract type, providers can trust that if a 90-day supply happened to be prescribed for a member with a 30-day contract limit, the pharmacy would simply cut back the day supply and adjust the refill count accordingly to align with that member's benefit design.

In an even greater illustration, if 40 percent of Health Plan patients who have Medicare Direct Pay coverage converted from filling 30-day prescriptions to 90-day prescriptions for common medications used to treat diabetes (non-insulin), high cholesterol, and hypertension, a savings of \$320,000 per year would be generated by these medications alone. This would translate to a savings of \$27 per member per year. When evaluating that same data on a per prescription claim level, these 90-day savings generated could reflect approximately \$1 per generic prescription, and \$29 per brand prescription.



Additionally, some benefit designs incentivize members to obtain 90-day fills. For example, for patients who have Medicare Direct Pay coverage through Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, a 30-day supply would cost a member one copay, while a 90-day supply would only cost a member two copays. This translates to patient savings of one copay per 90 days for this population.

Ninety-day prescriptions not only help patients who are stabilized on their maintenance medications overcome costly medication adherence challenges, but also can provide savings to value-based partnerships – and in some cases, savings to members. Excellus BCBS encourages providers to prescribe 90-day supplies when appropriate for patients who are stabilized on medications for managing chronic conditions.³

1. Yang, Y. (2009). Medication nonadherence and the risks of hospitalization, emergency department visits, and death among Medicare Part D enrollees with diabetes. *Drug Benefit Trends*, 1-9.

2. Taitel, M. (2012). Medication Days' Supply, Adherence, Wastage, and Cost among Chronic Patients in Medicaid. *Medicare and Medicaid Research Review*.

3. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (2018). Medicare 2019 Part C & D Star Ratings Technical Notes. Retrieved from <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Prescription-Drug-Coverage/PrescriptionDrugCovGenIn/Performance>

Isolation Impact on Back Pain, Comorbidities and Life



Responding to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has pushed individuals and systems to untested limits. Excellus BlueCross BlueShield thanks you for your tireless efforts. The healing power of caring communities working together has never been more evident!

While there are so many front-burner issues in dealing with COVID-19, we ask you to pause for a bit and think about what we will be seeing in our offices and hospitals in coming weeks.

With homebound isolation comes many poor health habits that can trigger or aggravate many health conditions dramatically. For example, we know there is typically an increased incidence of hip fractures in the spring as geriatrics start moving again after a sedentary winter. We suspect that this current state of prolonged isolation will increase hip fracture rates even more dramatically.

While some are taking this opportunity to increase their exercise programs, the majority are less active than usual, and the usual level of activity of the average American is sub-optimal to start. This decreased activity will likely trigger a multitude of musculoskeletal aches and pains, with back pain being the most common.

Of course, the impact of isolation, and the individual's health choices made in isolation, is potentially much more far reaching. Are individuals making wise daily decisions regarding enhancement of their health and immune system? This is a good time for all of us to remember that nutrition, sleep, relationships, fluid intake and movement all have significant impact on our ability to fight infection, as well as supplying the infrastructure to help control diabetes, cardiovascular disease, depression, anxiety, and most chronic conditions. (see *tip sheet on next page*)

We can minimize the coming wave of comorbid flare ups. Let's get the word out to remind folks to think about this question often and answer it correctly:

“What is the healthiest decision I can make right now?”



Spine Health Program Update:
Due to the COVID-19 situation, our nationally recognized primary care spine training program is being offered online. Receive two Category 1 CME credits from the convenience of home. To find out more about these trainings and other aspects of our spine program, contact brian.justice@excellus.com

Using 'MeMe' to Address COVID -19

Coping Skills and Immune System Enhancement for Members, Friends, Family, Co-workers – and You!

("MeMe" = Mindfulness, Eating, Movement, and Enjoyment)

It starts with Mindfulness – Paying attention to present moment experience and asking: What is the healthiest decision I can make right now?



MINDFULNESS

- Focus on what you can impact, within your focus of control
- Live in the present moment, it's all you have
- Focus on your environment
 - Avoid in-person gatherings
 - Have fun; get some laughs
 - Stay connected virtually (phone, web)
- Focus on you
 - You can wash hands for 20 seconds to decrease exposure
 - You can keep your hands from touching your face
 - Explore meditation and present moment awareness



MOVEMENT

- Instead of social distancing, use physical distancing. It is important to stay virtually connected, but 6 feet apart:
 - Movement through the day and moderate exercise strengthen your immune system
 - Go for a walk outside, do some yard work – nature heals!
 - Call a friend while on a walk, walk the dog, clean the basement – move!



EATING

- Stay hydrated (water is best, minimal caffeine and alcohol, no sugary drinks)
- Eating healthy to boost your immune system (colorful veggies and fruits are best)
- Try a new recipe that skips the refined carbohydrates and processed meats



ENJOY

- Do things that are fun for you within your health boundaries
 - Plan a garden or a room renovation
 - Watch a fun movie with a friend simultaneously, then talk about it on the phone
- Laughter is an instant mood booster and can improve health – releasing endorphins
 - Watch a comedy or home movies. Laugh out loud for 30 seconds and then note how good you feel
- Sleep improves your immune response, metabolism, appetite regulation and stress response:
 - Get 8 hours per night
 - Take a nap