

Changing Health Insurance Plans - Helpful Transition Tips

Until the new insurance plan has been approved, below are helpful tips to insure the best possible transition.

Emergency Care –

In case of an emergency situation, your client should call 911 or go to the nearest hospital* and pay cash or use a credit card for any incurred fees. Once their group is approved by the carrier, they can request reimbursement (less their plan's emergency room co-payment). Also remind clients to keep a record of their payment for submission to the carrier. Some plans waive the emergency room co-payment if the patient is admitted to the hospital directly from the emergency room. **Important: The diagnosis by the emergency room physician must meet the carrier's definition of a true emergency in order to receive any reimbursement.**

* Effective plan years beginning on or after 9/23/2010, Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) requires health plans to pay emergency services at in-network level even if provider is out of network. However, non-network providers may charge more than in-network contracted rate and member would be responsible for any charges over the in-network contracted rate.

If your client is taken by car or ambulance to a non-network hospital because it's within closer proximity than an in-network hospital, the new carrier must be notified within 24-48 hours. Please have them call their company's insurance contact person or you, the broker, if they need assistance with this notification process.

Continuity of Care/Completion of Covered Services –

If your client or their enrolling spouse/domestic partner is pregnant and receiving care from a non-network doctor, your client is undergoing treatment for an acute condition, a serious chronic condition or terminal illness by a non-network doctor or your client's newborn child is receiving care from a non-network doctor between birth and age 36 months, they may come under the provisions of the California law requiring carriers to provide continuity of care (completion of covered services) with the non-network doctor in specific circumstances. It is important that they notify their company's designated insurance contact person or you as soon as possible to get assistance with submitting the continuity of care form to the carrier if their situation meets this law's criteria and the carrier's program guidelines.

Doctor Office Visit –

Some offices will allow the patient to sign a waiver and pay for the visit up front. Remind your client to keep a record of their payment for submission to the carrier along with their reimbursement form once they have their new ID number. If your client is a current patient, some doctors will agree to bill the new insurance carrier once the patient gets their new insurance ID number and will have them pay only the office visit co-pay for their new plan. It is best to call the office before their appointment and explain their situation so they know what the payment procedures are in advance. If this visit can be postponed without adverse consequences to their health, they may want to consider rescheduling their appointment for a later date when they have their new ID number.

NOTE: Effective plan years beginning on or after 9/23/2010, Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) requires health plans to cover Preventive Care with no cost sharing by members (no copays/coinsurance). Check with your health plan carrier regarding what is included as preventive care.

Prescriptions –

Clients should refill maintenance prescriptions prior to the effective date for their new coverage. For example, they should refill a maintenance high blood pressure medication no later than 12/31 for new coverage that will be effective 1/1. If they need to fill a prescription on or after the effective date for their new coverage, but they do not have their new ID number yet, they can pay for the prescription at the pharmacy and then request reimbursement from the carrier once they receive their new ID number. For reimbursement, they must submit the pharmacy receipt that includes the name of the drug & dosage rather than only the cash register receipt. If they paid for the prescription by credit or debit card, and return to the pharmacy with their ID number within 7-10 business days,

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some pharmacies will credit any overpayment back to their account. This is the fastest way for them to get their money back. When a medication is expensive, some pharmacies will work with the client by allowing them to buy a smaller amount (Ex: 10-day supply). When the client returns to pick up the remaining balance of their 30-day supply, the appropriate payment adjustment will be made once they show the pharmacy their new ID number. Some brand name drugs have generic equivalents that are much more cost effective. You or your client can find out if their prescription medication is name brand or generic (and the co-pay amount) by using the carrier's Web site RX search.

Once the plan is approved and your clients' employees have received their new membership cards:

- They should carry their membership card at all times. It is important for them to show their new ID card to their doctor during the first visit after their new insurance plan becomes effective.
- Your clients should always make sure they use an in-network doctor or an in-network hospital in order to maximize their coverage and prevent significant gaps in coverage and/or higher out of pocket expenses.
- You should encourage your clients to review all of the benefit descriptions they received during enrollment and their Explanation of Benefits booklets (which the carrier mails to their home address) so they are familiar with their co-payments and covered procedures.
- Ensure they are aware of which procedures will require prior authorization in their plan documents. Remember that procedures authorized with their previous carrier may require pre-authorization with their new carrier. Each carrier has their own criteria, so an authorization by one carrier does not guarantee authorization by another carrier in all circumstances.
- For any additional questions, your client should call Member Services (the phone number is listed on their ID card)