



Diane Koontz
President

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Seema Verma, M.P.H.
Administrator
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Department of Health and Human Services
Attn: CMS-9915-P
P.O. Box 8010
Baltimore, MD 21244

Re: Providing Appropriate Pharmacy Access to Senior Care Beneficiaries; COVID 19

Dear Administrator Verma:

MHA fully appreciates, values and understands the focus that CMS has placed on the wide array of challenges COVID-19 has placed on our overall healthcare system. It truly is a national crisis and something we have never experienced but I am firm believer that if we continue to work together, share and learn from our experiences we can overcome just about any challenge. Therefore, on behalf of Managed Health Care Associates (MHA) and our network of Long Term Care Pharmacies we are following up on our previous letter dated on March 19th.

MHA represents both the senior living facilities as well as the LTC pharmacies that service this market. As this crisis worsens the facilities and the pharmacies are in need of additional support. They are often overlooked due to focus and emphasis that many parties place on the hospitals so I must continue the outreach and ask CMS to removes these barriers and continue to cut the red tape so these pharmacies can do what they do best, take care of our seniors.

The Medicaid waivers just announced so states can temporarily suspend prior authorization requirements, suspend some nursing home pre-admission reviews, ease reimbursement for care delivered in alternative settings due to facility evacuations, and relax provider enrollment requirements to allow states to more quickly enroll out-of-state or other new providers to expand access to care is a great start but we are in need of these waivers for all of Medicare Part D.

Senior Living Facilities receive all of their medications via contracted third party pharmacies, Long Term Care (LTC) pharmacies. These LTC pharmacies serve patients that are the most vulnerable and at risk to COVID-19. Forty-eight percent (48%) of prescriptions dispensed for Senior Care Beneficiaries in Senior Living Facilities are covered through Part D.

The LTC industry continues to struggle with these administrative barriers impacting the ability for LTC Pharmacies to service the Senior Care Beneficiaries. We respectfully request CMS to review and take into consideration suspending the following requirements during this national crisis. We believe that easing these requirements would provide significant additional measures to protect the Senior Care Beneficiaries. Within these facilities, as well as the LTC pharmacies and their staff.

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- Dispensing brands 14 day supply or less.
 - a. The CDC has already issued recommendations for nursing homes and other LTC settings to include restrictions on all visitors as well as “non-essential health care personnel”. Allowing the dispensing of up to 34 days’ supply will reduce the exposure of the facility and LTC pharmacy personnel to COVID 19 by decreasing the amount of deliveries necessary and further reduce the risk of location-to- location transmission.
 - b. Reducing the number of deliveries and providing a greater days’ supply per dispense could also mean less packaging into the Senior Living Facility, further reducing the risk of viral transmission via plastic and cardboard containers such as blister packs. (NEJM March 17, 2020).

- Non-Formulary Prior Authorizations (PA) and Formulary Interchanges.
 - a. PAs are required for many drugs and the prescribing physician must provide the appropriate documentation supporting the use of the drug for the specific patient. With the demand that has been placed on the overall healthcare system, physicians and medical directors, the need for the PA is placing a huge administrative burden on the pharmacies and in many cases they are only allowed to provide a 3 day supply until PA is obtained.

 - b. In addition, PDPs also require that select and or preferred drugs which are part of the formulary are dispensed. Allowing formulary interchanges to occur based upon the professional judgement of the pharmacist would enable timely and appropriate therapy to patients, as physician attention to these requests are currently being delayed. Furthermore, these requests are often creating additional visits to Senior Living Facilities.

- Audits.
 - a. While select PBM’s have suspended all audits, others have chosen to implement and replace on-site audits with desk audits. Desk Audits during this national crisis are still a huge administrative burden for the pharmacies. Effective today, March 24th Prime Therapeutics suspended all audits and once again having consistency amongst the PBMs would relief the administrative burden.

- Point of Delivery Signatures.
 - a. While CMS released on Friday March 20th guidance around face-to – face signature requirements however, please note not all PDPs/PBMs have relaxed these requirements therefore putting another complexity to the process. The pharmacies are having to verify and validate by PDP/PBM. Therefore, we encourage all the PDP/PBMs to make this a requirement so we have consistency across the industry.

The LTC Pharmacy/Facility/Beneficiary care model provides a highly managed environment with an interdisciplinary team ensuring beneficiaries are receiving appropriate medical and pharmacy care. The suspension of the referenced administrative requirements would go far to reduce possible risk of transmission of COVID-19; would not expose patients to any adverse events and would provide a pathway for less disruption of the LTC pharmacist's ability to deliver the appropriate level of care to this most vulnerable population during this crisis.

MHA is available to answer questions and provide any additional information to CMS to help implement these changes expeditiously and consistently. We are also more than willing to propose a round table discussion with other stakeholders in the industry, such as the Senior Care Pharmacy Coalition (SCPC) and the National Community Pharmacists Association, (NCPA) if you believe that would be helpful.

On behalf of our members and this industry we thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Diane Koontz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Diane Koontz

Cc: Ms. Amy Larrick