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November 8, 2018



PATIENTS BEWARE: Advocacy Groups Warn Patients of New Unexpected Rx Costs Hidden in Insurance Plans

Coalition Sounds Alarm During Open Enrollment over New “Copay Accumulators”

SOUTHFIELD—The Michigan Coalition for Affordable Prescriptions today, at the beginning of the Open Enrollment Period, sounded the alarm over an insurance policy change from a number of major health insurers threatening to send out-of-pocket prescription drug costs skyrocketing for many Michigan patients.

Consumers should beware when shopping for a plan that some health plans have begun quietly slipping a new change into their policies that will no longer allow patients to benefit from pharmaceutical manufacturer coupons that many drug companies provide to help defray the costs of expensive specialty medicines. The devastating policy change, called a “co-pay accumulator,” could increase many families’ out-of-pocket costs by thousands of dollars per year.

Pharmaceutical companies have long provided manufacturer coupons to patients with rare diseases, including those living with epilepsy, AIDs, cancer, and others. This assistance has always applied to a patient’s deductible or out-of-pocket caps, and makes expensive, lifesaving medicine affordable for hundreds of thousands of Americans.

Under health insurers’ new “co-pay accumulator” policy, insurers will continue to collect thousands from drug manufacturers via each patient’s coupons, but will refuse to apply the cash assistance to a patient’s out-of-pocket caps, allowing the insurer to double-dip and collect thousands of dollars more per patient per year.

“It is absolutely critical that patients and families choosing their health plan for the year – especially those who regularly count on their prescription drug coverage – be on the lookout for copay accumulators being included into many policies,” said Brianna Romines, MPA, President of the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan. “Millions of patients rely on manufacturer

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coupons to afford the medicine they need, and now they will be on the hook even longer as they try to reach their deductible”.

The Open Enrollment Period for 2019 began on November 1 and runs through December 15. Open Enrollment is the time when many families select their health insurance provider for the upcoming calendar year.

According to national advocates, numerous pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs, and large insurers, including Express Scripts, CVS Caremark, Optum Rx, UnitedHealthCare, Molina, and others have quietly begun implementing copay accumulator programs. According to one study, more than half of all large businesses are also considering this costly shift within the next two years.

“This quiet new change will mean huge sticker shock and massive new out-of-pocket costs at the pharmacy counter for patients caught unaware,” said Erica Bills, Executive Director for Susan G. Komen Michigan. “This Open Enrollment Period, it’s more important than ever to shop carefully to avoid these new insurer payment structures that could raise your out-of-pocket costs.”

For more information on copay accumulators, please view:

- [Video](#) on what copay accumulator programs are and how they affect patients;
- [Examples of hidden copay accumulator policies](#) in select health plans;
- [Scenario](#) of patient out-of-pocket costs for medications under accumulator framework;
- [Letter](#) signed by 58 patient, provider, and consumer groups to State Insurance Commissioners explaining their opposition to copay accumulators;
- [Letter](#) signed by 60 HIV organizations to State Insurance Commissioners and Attorneys General.

The Michigan Coalition for Affordable Prescriptions is an alliance of patient advocacy organizations, including Susan G. Komen Michigan, the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan, the Brain Injury Association of Michigan, Unified HIV Health and Beyond, the American Cancer Society – Cancer Action Network, and the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America, Michigan Chapter.

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