



September 11, 2018

Nancy Hogue, Pharm.D.
Director of Pharmacy Services
DVHA Pharmacy Administration
DVHA-312 Hurricane Lane
Williston, VT 05495

Dear Nancy Hogue, Pharm.D., Director of Pharmacy Services and Drug Utilization Board Members:

On behalf of the Epilepsy Foundation and our local affiliate, the Epilepsy Foundation of Vermont, and the almost 6,500 individuals living with epilepsy and seizures in Vermont, we are writing to urge you to ensure open access to epilepsy medication – anticonvulsants – on the state Medicaid preferred drug list. Epilepsy medications are not interchangeable and treatment of epilepsy is highly individualized. Limiting access to lifesaving medications and interrupting proven treatment regimens due to drug formulary changes intended to cut costs can result in harmful changes to patient therapies and are far costlier to the Medicaid program in the long run.

The Epilepsy Foundation is the leading national voluntary health organization that speaks on behalf of at the least 3.4 million Americans with epilepsy and seizures. We foster the wellbeing of children and adults affected by seizures through research programs, educational activities, advocacy, and direct services. Epilepsy is a medical condition that produces seizures affecting a variety of mental and physical functions. Approximately 1 in 26 Americans will develop epilepsy at some point in their lifetime. For people living with epilepsy, timely access to appropriate, physician-directed care, including epilepsy medications, is a critical concern. Epilepsy medications are the most common and cost-effective treatment for controlling and/or reducing seizures. To delay, change, limit, or deny access to medications could be extremely dangerous.

There is no “one size fits all” treatment option for epilepsy, and the response to medications can be different for each person. Maintaining seizure control with minimal side effects requires careful evaluation and monitoring by physicians and their patients. Individuals living with epilepsy who have their medications switched, or who experience a delay in accessing their medication, are at a high risk for developing breakthrough seizures and related complications including death.

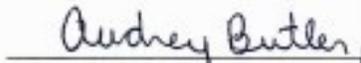
Further, limits to physician-directed care can also significantly increase medical costs related to preventable seizures, along with lost wages and productivity, not just for the individuals living with epilepsy but also their families and communities. This is why many states and the federal Medicaid program provide for access to all epilepsy medications.

Selection of the appropriate medication to prevent seizures is determined by a number of variables, including type of seizure, seizure frequency, age, gender, and other health conditions.

Determining the right medication for a particular person may require trial-and-error, along with close observation of blood levels and side effects. For these reasons, physicians and their patients need to be assured that the full array of treatment options is available without onerous utilization management protocols, including alternative formulations of a drug such as extended release versions that are particularly important for disease management and patient compliance among the individuals with multiple complex and chronic conditions. The treating physician is in the best position to make the judgment about which medication is most appropriate.

The Epilepsy Foundation and Epilepsy Foundation of Vermont oppose policies intended to restrict access to physician-directed care. These policies unnecessarily prolong ineffective treatment and prevent individuals from immediately starting the treatment that their physicians, who provide care based on their expert knowledge and experience, think is best. We urge you to ensure broad access to epilepsy medications in your discussion of the state preferred drug list. Please feel free to contact Abbey Roudebush, Government Relations Manager, at aroudebush@efa.org or 301-918-3784 with any questions or follow-up.

Sincerely,



Audrey Butler
Executive Director
Epilepsy Foundation of Vermont



Philip M. Gattone, M.Ed.
President & CEO
Epilepsy Foundation

CC:

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