



October 26, 2020

Beth Anderson
California Plan President
Anthem, Inc.
21215 Burbank Blvd.
Woodland Hills, CA 91367

Dear Ms. Anderson:

A proposed new prescription policy from Anthem Blue Cross (Anthem) will present significant obstacles to patients and interrupt necessary treatments that keep inflammatory disease (among other conditions) under control. On behalf of the California Rheumatology Association (CRA) membership and other patient and physician advocacy organizations, we request a meeting with you to share our concerns, and sincere hope that Anthem will reconsider policy adjustments that will drive costs up while making it nearly impossible for infusion therapy to be conducted in the safest way possible – in provider offices under our care.

Recently some of CRA's PPO providers received a notice from Anthem that a new policy (beginning on December 1, 2020) will require physicians to procure therapeutics from Anthem's preferred specialty pharmacy. While moving payments away from the medical side (physicians) and placing it on the pharmacy side, it will drive up the cost for the patient and Anthem's customers.

While the rebates and hidden fees may seem attractive with an Anthem and specialty pharmacy alliance, costs rise at much faster rates under these scenarios than with physician procured medicines – a burden on the patient, and Anthem customers.

Normally provider administered drugs are obtained via a “buy and bill” system where a provider purchases medication and bills the insurance company under a patient's medical benefit. The new policy moves administered medication away from the physician and their medical benefit to the patient's pharmacy benefit - effectively reversing work providers have done to reduce patient costs for physician administered medications.

As a result of Anthem's policy change, patients will be increasingly forced into more expensive sites of care such as hospitals or to sites where there is no direct supervision by physicians, nurse practitioners, or physician assistants.

The current model utilized for in office infusion provides flexibility when a patient may be too ill to receive an infusion, unable to make the appointment, adjusting medications prior to administration. These situations are common making up nearly 20% of treatments. Currently medication is not wasted or charged to the carrier in these instances. However, with the “white bag” specialty pharmacy system proposed by Anthem, the medication will already be delivered and charged specifically for the care of that individual patient – resulting in logistical challenges and greater expense.

Higher prices, and reduced access to care – surely these are outcomes you want to avoid.

Providers advocate for patients. We always seek the best therapy at the lowest price. By forcing the procurement of prescriptions through Anthem's designated specialty pharmacy – and deny the physician reimbursement (even if obtained at a lower price) it presents significant negative impacts for all stakeholders – the patient, your customers, even the economy and public health.

We will be sounding the alarm on this policy change and alerting our patients, legislators, regulators, employers, and others in the coming days to share the ramifications of what is proposed.

During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, people are anxious and worried about their health. Those patients with chronic inflammatory conditions remain very concerned about contracting COVID-19 and we want to avoid increasing anxiety by suggesting that they change how their medications are procured and administered. This policy will only serve to create more concern among patients, particularly now when a sense of security and stability is what people are seeking.

Our office will be in touch this week to request an opportunity to meet with you, along with some of our patients (and your policy holders) to respectfully advocate for a reconsideration of this dangerous policy. In the meantime, I am available at 310-536-0460 or susui@calrheum.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Samy Metyas", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Samy Metyas, MD
President
California Rheumatology Alliance