

September 29, 2011

Assemblyman Richard N. Gottfried
New York State Assembly
District Office
242 West 27th Street
New York, NY 10001

Dear Assemblyman Gottfried,

On behalf of the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA), representing the interests of registered nurses and the patients they serve, I am writing to you in support of the efforts of the Hispanic Federation, and with concerns regarding the transfer of pharmacy benefits into managed care for approximately three million Medicare beneficiaries, set to take place on October 1.

Our concerns focus on the implementation of this transfer of benefits. If the transfer of pharmacy benefits into managed care is not delayed, these beneficiaries, among the most vulnerable residents of New York state, would have no guarantee of continuity of care and no guarantee that they will be able to continue a medication regimen that their prescriber has initiated in their best interest.

As advocates, our initial analysis has identified the following difficulties:

- Official communication to patients, health and service providers was delayed. Letters were sent to patients in late August 2011. Unfortunately, the NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH) has not been responsive to the fact that many Medicaid recipients will not be able to comprehend the changes stated in the notification letters nor have access to computers to research health plan options. The local non-profit managing consumer assistance programs that were culturally responsible and rooted in the community, are no longer available as a result of funding cuts. The provider community recently received flyers via e-mail from NYSDOH but there is no guarantee that the flyers will be posted or legible. NYSDOH did not create a "Pharmacy Benefit Toolkit" for providers that would have enabled better assistance to recipients.
- The NYSDOH currently has very little information available online regarding the different plans for consumers that are able to access the Internet. NYSDOH will not commit to developing a streamlined website that links all the plans and formularies for easier navigation by recipients. One plan requires reading more than seven linked pages before reaching the formulary and then the consumer must discriminate between eleven different formularies. Heavy reliance on the Internet also fails to recognize the "digital divide" that exists for this population, as many are without access to home computers.
- NYSDOH also will not commit to developing a standardized, prior authorization drug request form to be utilized by managed care plans. A standardized process and form would allow providers to access necessary treatments for patients.

Nurses and patients across New York state are concerned with the implementation of this transfer of benefits on October 1. Disruption of access to medications, which could potentially harm the health and well-being of Medicaid recipients, is not acceptable. We respectfully request an implementation delay of this transfer of benefits until the concerns, stated above, have been addressed.

Thank you for your continued support and ongoing dedication to protect the state's most vulnerable populations.

Tina Gerardi



MS, RN, CAE
Chief Executive Officer

CC: Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver

Constituent of the American Nurses Association