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*Director*

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency  
Department of Health Care Services



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER  
*Governor*

April 10, 2009

Dear Medi-Cal Managed Care Provider:

We need your help. The purpose of this letter is to introduce you to the Emergency Room (ER) Health Education Campaign, sponsored by the Statewide ER Collaborative, made up of representatives from all 22 Medi-Cal Managed Care plans and the Department of Health Care Services, Medi-Cal Managed Care Division (MMCD). Medi-Cal Managed Care requires by contract that all plans participate in a statewide quality improvement collaborative that addresses a quality of care or access issue for Medi-Cal Managed Care members. Since the previous statewide collaborative concluded in 2008, Medi-Cal Managed Care plans and MMCD began work on planning the next collaborative in 2007, focusing on the increasing number of ER visits by Medi-Cal Managed Care members. Initial surveys found that approximately 20% of all ER visits by plan members were non-urgent and avoidable; i.e., occurred for conditions that could have more appropriately been seen by the member's primary care provider, and that 74 % of the avoidable ER visits in members age 1-19 were for URIs, pharyngitis, or earaches. The goal of the collaborative is to reduce avoidable visits to the ER in members, age 1-19, by 10 % over the life of the collaborative. The health education campaign focuses on these three conditions above that are responsible for most of the avoidable ER visits.

The collaborative looked at many reasons for this growing problem, and explored many potential interventions that could help direct Medi-Cal members to their primary care provider for non-urgent conditions and, in turn, strengthen the provider-patient medical home. The collaborative reviewed published literature and conferred with national consultants to arrive at 128 ICD-9 codes that represented "avoidable ER visit" diagnosis codes.

The ER Collaborative discussed and developed a common intervention that could be implemented to assist plans to reduce the avoidable ER visit rate. The State of California requests your help by participating with your plans in the collaborative health education intervention that seeks to educate members regarding appropriate ER use and provide members a better alternative than the ER for medical problems best treated by yourself. We must stress, the collaborative intention is not to interfere with member's appropriate use of the ER and, for this reason, the collaborative focuses only on reducing non-urgent avoidable visits.

Your participation and help are essential to achieve this goal. Your Medi-Cal Managed Care plan representative will contact you in the next few weeks, if that has not already occurred, to introduce and deliver the collaborative poster and brochures and answer questions about the Statewide Health Education Campaign. We believe the collaborative common intervention was chosen with the understanding and appreciation of the challenges providing care in the current health care environment, of the difficulty providing care to patients who may have barriers to compliance, and the pressures today in maintaining a busy practice.

The Health Education ER Campaign developed a tool kit which included a poster and brochures for your office, available in both English and Spanish. The poster and brochure introduce members to the Health Education ER Campaign slogan, "**Not Sure it's an Emergency?**" and the brochure provides supporting information and practical strategies regarding care and prevention for colds, sore throats, and earaches. These tools have been carefully focus-tested with selected plan providers and members throughout California and will streamline the time spent educating members regarding appropriate use of the emergency room. Furthermore, the brochures allow members to take this information home to serve as a future resource.

We encourage you to discuss with members when it is appropriate to use the emergency room related to their individual medical history and what to do if they are not sure their condition is an emergency. Moreover, we encourage you to work with your health plan to identify what other resources may be available to facilitate member education regarding appropriate use of emergency rooms. We look forward to working with you.

Please contact your Medi-Cal Managed Care health plan representative with any questions you might have. Again, thank you very much for your support and help in this important California collaborative.

Sincerely,

*Michael C. Farber M.D.*

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