Emergency Supply of Drugs

Sometimes it will be necessary for the pharmacist to request authorization to dispense an emergency supply of a prescription when the prescriber is unavailable to either change the medication or obtain preauthorization. A number of medications are subject to prior authorization, such as non-preferred medications, very expensive drugs, or those not included in HealthChoice Managed Care Organizations’ (MCOs) formularies. The State is required to respond to all requests for prior authorization within 24 hours. When a prescription is denied at point-of-service for lack of prior authorization, the pharmacist is allowed, in an emergency, to dispense a 72-hour supply of the drug. However, the pharmacist must call a 24/7 telephone number to obtain authorization for the emergency supply. In the case of sprays, inhalers, eye drops, creams, ointments, antibiotics etc. it may be necessary to dispense the entire prescription as an emergency supply due to the way the drug is packaged or administered.

When a “prior authorization required” denial is received, the pharmacy should contact the prescriber to either change the medication or have the prescriber obtain necessary prior authorization. It would be beneficial if the pharmacist can advise the prescriber of the alternative drugs that are preferred and do not require preauthorization. Normally the prescriber can obtain authorization with a phone call. If not, and delays in the authorization process increase risk for the patient, the prescriber can request the pharmacist to dispense an emergency supply.

In the event the pharmacist is unable to contact the prescriber, s/he may determine that it is in the best interest of the recipient to dispense an emergency supply.

The recipient may present mobility or access issues that make returning to the pharmacy very difficult or expensive. The pharmacist should take this factor into consideration when deciding whether or not to dispense an emergency supply.

In the case of Fee For Service recipients or for mental health drugs covered by the State, the number to call to obtain authorization to dispense an emergency supply is 800-923-3918. For HealthChoice MCO members’ non-mental health drugs, the pharmacist must contact the appropriate Pharmacy Benefit Manager and follow their procedures before dispensing an emergency supply. The contact information for these is given on the web at http://www.mdmahealthchoicerx.com.

During the 72-hour window, the pharmacist is to contact the prescriber who must obtain prior authorization before the remainder of the prescription can be dispensed. After prior authorization has been established, the pharmacist can dispense the remainder of the prescription.

Further details about implementation of this policy, including co-pay and dispensing fee information, may be found in Advisories No 2, 3, 5B (page 9), and 7 (page 3) at http://www.dhmh.state.md.us/mma/mpap/provadv.html.