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Subject: Prior Authorization for Chronic Concomitant Use of Benzodiazepines and Opioids in the Primary Care Clinician Plan and Primary Care Accountable Care Organizations

Key Points:

- Per the March 2016 CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain, clinicians should avoid prescribing opioid pain medication and benzodiazepines concurrently whenever possible.¹
- Effective 11/25/2019, chronic use of concurrent benzodiazepines and opioids (≥ 60 days) will require a prior authorization (PA). Approvals for continued use will be granted after meeting the published MassHealth Drug List approval criteria.
- The MassHealth drug utilization review program will work with prescribers to facilitate a safe benzodiazepine reduction plan that will potentially lead to discontinuation.
- If a dose reduction, taper, or discontinuation is not deemed appropriate by the prescriber, and a request for continued use does not meet the MassHealth Drug List approval criteria, a provisional approval may be granted and further review will be undertaken by our multidisciplinary workgroup.
- Emergency overrides will be available at the pharmacy while awaiting completion of the PA process.

Dear Prescriber,

Opioids and benzodiazepines are the most common drug classes involved in pharmaceutical overdoses.² In 2010, approximately 30% of overdose deaths had concomitant opioids and benzodiazepines identified upon autopsy. Further, 77% of overdose deaths related to benzodiazepines also involved opioids.²

Benzodiazepines facts:

- Approximately 5.6% of the U.S. adult population uses a benzodiazepine³
- Recommended for short-term and intermittent use
- Long-term use can lead to tolerance, psychological and physiological dependence and memory impairment.⁴
- Risks with concomitant use of opioids:
 - Respiratory depression, impaired coordination with resultant increased risk for falls, hospitalizations, intentional and unintentional overdose or injury⁵
 - Increased risk in those with substance use disorder, respiratory disorders, suicide risk, sleep apnea, elderly individuals^{6,7}

- All benzodiazepines have the same side effects and drug interaction risks.
- Alprazolam and diazepam were among the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's list of the top ten medications tied to overdose deaths.⁸

To address this serious concern of overuse and associated risks of overdose, MassHealth is implementing a PA requirement for the concomitant use of chronic benzodiazepines and opioids. Effective with the 11/25/2019 MassHealth Drug List update, overlapping pharmacy claims of an opioid and a benzodiazepine, when used for at least 60 days within a 90-day period, will require a PA. **Approvals for continued use will only be granted after meeting the published MassHealth Drug List approval criteria.** Documentation of long-term plans regarding a dose reduction will be required. A prolonged taper schedule may be utilized to address concerns of possible withdrawal symptoms and medication management in complex patients.

The MassHealth Drug List, including Therapeutic Class Table 69 (Barbiturates, Benzodiazepines and Miscellaneous Antianxiety Agents) outlining the coverage status and PA criteria for all affected agents, will be updated to reflect these changes. As a method for continuous quality assurance, improvement, and transparency, a multidisciplinary Therapeutic Class Management (TCM) workgroup will retrospectively review PA requests that have been issued provisional approvals; however, do not meet the required criteria of a dose reduction or taper plan, will provide an increased level of clinical expertise to evaluate cases where the prescriber believes continuation of concurrent therapy is appropriate, and will discuss possible clinically appropriate alternative treatment options with the prescriber. Any criteria will be updated as needed based on current evidence-based medicine.

Further information on the MassHealth Drug List and PA forms can be found at www.mass.gov/masshealth/pharmacy. Some helpful resources for implementation of benzodiazepine and/or opioid tapers can be found online at:

Benzodiazepine Education Resource:

https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/AcademicDetailingService/Documents/Academic_Detailing_Educational_Material_Catalog/22_Benzodiazepine_Provider_AD_Educational_Guide_IB_10_928.pdf#

Opioid Taper Resource:

https://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/AcademicDetailingService/Documents/Academic_Detailing_Educational_Material_Catalog/52_Pain_Opioid_Taper_Tool_IB_10_939_P96820.pdf#

We appreciate your continued support and dedication to providing high quality healthcare to MassHealth members.

Sincerely,



Paul L. Jeffrey, PharmD
Director of Pharmacy
MassHealth

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