



PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY
OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Prior Authorization/Step Therapy Press Conference

Introduction of Senate Bill and House Bill 225

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

10:00 a.m.

Good morning, I am Dr. Tracey Conti, President of the Pennsylvania Academy of Family Physicians. Thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of our nearly 6,000 physician, resident and student members, and our patients.

While prior authorization delays and step therapy protocols can be an administrative nightmare for physicians, it is nothing compared to the impact on our patients.

Let me share some stats...

In a 2018 study of Pennsylvania family physicians, the PAFP found that prior authorization results in delays in patient care 98 percent of the time. Let me repeat that – prior authorization delays patient care 98 percent of the time.

According to a 2019 study from the American Medical Association, 24 percent of physicians report that prior authorization has led to a serious adverse event for a patient in their care, while 16 percent report that prior authorization has led to a patient's hospitalization.

Further troubling, 74 percent of physicians in the same study report that prior authorization can at least sometimes, if not always, lead patients to abandon their recommended course of treatment. This can lead to devastating consequences to a patient's health and that is completely unacceptable.

Imagine being a patient recently diagnosed with diabetes. Now, imagine having to wait days or weeks to receive the crucial care needed to treat your illness because your insurance company has determined that a decision by YOUR physician for YOUR course of treatment needs to be authorized by someone who has no knowledge of your health history or current health needs. Meanwhile, you wait anxiously to begin treatment that, at the very least may improve your quality of life and very well may end up saving your life.

Unfortunately, this happens ALL. THE. TIME.

We must obtain prior authorizations for not only for medications but for radiology tests, in-office procedures, and equipment. I have a patient that has a rare form of diabetes – latent auto immune diabetes in adult onset. This requires her to check her sugars multiple times a day. Every year I have to spend hours justifying her diagnosis, her supply needs, including test strips and pen needles, in addition to her medication. This is not only an inefficiency for me and my office staff but also increases the anxiety of my patient about her condition and asks her to question whether anyone is truly concerned about her.

This story is not unique. Unfortunately, patients and physicians across Pennsylvania have had similar experiences. This needs to stop now.

The simple reforms outlined in House Bill 225 and Senate Bill 225 – such as giving providers access to more efficient electronic prior authorization systems and establishing turnaround times for prior authorization decisions – will go a long way in ensuring that patients are receiving the care they need, when they need it, determined by their physician, not their health insurance company.

Let us be clear – this legislation does NOT prohibit insurers from utilizing the prior authorization process for prescription drugs or services. Nor does it prohibit insurers from using fail first protocols or limit the number of allowed steps. We physicians understand the need for cost-savings in our health care system as well as anyone. The legislation simply provides for more transparency and consistency in the prior authorization and step therapy processes to accelerate appropriate patient care.

Twenty-seven other states have adopted some version of prior authorization reforms like those outlined in House Bill and Senate Bill 225.

Additionally, 28 states have adopted legislation to allow physicians to override a step therapy if the required drug would cause harm to a patient, is expected to be ineffective, or has already been tried under a previous health plan.

It is far time for Pennsylvania to do the same. By adopting the reforms in House Bill and Senate Bill 225, we can help ensure timely, quality patient care, which may ultimately lead to improved health outcomes for more Pennsylvanians.

Thank you, Senator Kristin Phillips-Hill and Representative Steve Mentzer, for understanding the enormous impact that prior authorizations have on patient health and taking steps to help make the process more efficient, consistent and transparent. I would encourage all members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly to support these important reforms.

Thank you.