MMA goes head on against medication prior authorization

BY DAN HAUSER

The MMA is taking an aggressive stance toward fixing prior authorization (PA) for medications this legislative session.

Working with authors from both parties in the House and Senate, the MMA introduced legislation in mid-February that would completely change the process. The chief Senate author is Melisa Franzen (DFL-Edina); the chief House author is Tony Albright (R-Prior Lake).

The legislation would end prior authorization for most drugs and instead permit insurers to conduct retrospective reviews of prescriptions for purposes of quality improvement. PA could still be required for medications that are not on a health plan’s formulary.
The legislation also would:
• Require insurers to provide consumers with information about medication coverage and cost-sharing prior to their purchasing insurance
• Limit the type and frequency of formulary changes a health plan can make during the enrollment year
• Create a 60-day transition period for patients changing insurance plans to prevent gaps in their access to medications.

In addition, the MMA-backed legislation calls for creating a task force to monitor trends in medication coverage and formulary design. It also would mandate use of Minnesota’s existing prior authorization and formulary exception form, and require health plans to provide better information to prescribers about covered alternatives when an initial prescription is denied and make decisions about coverage faster.

The MMA launched its work on medication PA in earnest in June 2013. Member George Schoephoerster, MD, led this effort, talking with a variety of physicians and clinic administrators to gather their PA “horror stories.” The MMA tried to work with the health plans to improve the PA process but met with resistance. A task force was formed in 2014; it provided recommendations to the Board of Trustees in January. The board opted for the most aggressive stance, which is reflected in the proposed legislation.

The MMA continues to gather stories about problems with PA at www.mnmed.org/PriorAuth and has created a website to provide a quick overview of the issue and share physician and patient stories, www.fixPAnow.com. Physicians are also encouraged to use the hashtag #fixPAnow and tweet their feelings about PA.

For an in-depth look at the issue, read “The prior authorization burden” (p. 18) in the November/December 2014 edition of *Minnesota Medicine*.

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**MMA in Action**

In late January, MMA President [Donald Jacobs](#), MD, and [Barbara Daiker](#), MMA manager of quality, spoke on “Physician Collaboration: Meeting the Challenges of Modern Medicine” at New Ulm Medical Center.

[Eric Dick](#), manager of state legislative affairs, and [Mandy Rubenstein](#), manager of physician outreach, traveled to Fergus Falls in January to provide a legislative update to physicians at Lake Region Health Care. Dick shared the MMA’s 2015 legislative priorities and gave an update on what’s happening with those issues. Dick also gave a legislative update, focusing on issues of interest to ENTs, at the Minnesota Academy of Otolaryngology’s winter meeting in Minneapolis in late January.

MMA members [John Abenstein](#), MD, [Maya Babu](#), MD, MMA CEO [Robert Meiches](#), MD, and [Dave Renner](#), director of state and federal legislation, attended the AMA’s Advocacy Resource Center State Legislative Strategy Conference in New Orleans in January. The conference, which attracts more than 200 physician leaders and medical society staffs, offers participants an opportunity to share their states’ legislative priorities with other state medical societies.

MMA Board Chair [Douglas Wood](#), MD, testified before the House Health and Human Services Reform Committee in late January to highlight the MMA’s key legislative priorities for the session.

[Will Nicholson](#), MD, testified before the Senate Health and Human Services Finance Division in early February regarding Gov. Mark Dayton’s budget recommendations. He made a plea for increased loan forgiveness funding for physicians willing to work in underserved parts of the state and for reinstating the Medical Assistance payment increase for primary care services. The following week, [Donald Jacobs](#), MD, testified on the same issues before the House HHS committee.

MMA and Board of Medical Practice member [Jon Thomas](#), MD, and MMA staffer [Teresa Knoedler](#), JD, testified on behalf of interstate licensure compact legislation in February.