



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

November 6, 2019

Dr. Melwyn B. Wendt, PharmD  
Pharmacy Director  
628 N. 4<sup>th</sup> Street  
Baton Rouge, LA 70821

Dear Dr. Wendt

On behalf of the thousands of people living in Louisiana who live with a mood disorder, the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is writing today to voice our concerns about the Medicaid proposal to remove certain medical products from the preferred drug list, including long-acting injectable medications used to treat mood disorders.

DBSA is the leading peer-led patient advocacy organization for people with lived experience of mood disorders. DBSA is led by and represents the voice of individuals who themselves have a mood disorder diagnosis. We believe that the opportunity to lead a thriving life begins with hope and continues with access to quality mental health care, including medication, that meets individualized needs. Today, DBSA reaches three million people, including free, in-person peer support provided to 49,000 individuals who attend the more than 600 support group meetings led by our nationwide network of over 250 chapters.

DBSA believes that every person deserves the opportunity not just to survive, but to thrive and to do that, they need access to best innovations in mental health treatment. It is from this person-first perspective, we ask you to carefully reconsider the burden this change in policy will place on people as we believe it will have the inadvertent effect of creating a barrier to providing the best wellness outcomes for individuals living with mood disorders. Our concerns are outlined below.

1. The choice to remove medications from the preferred drug list and subject patients to prior authorization requirements after they have already completed step therapy requirements will decrease access to mental health medication. These conditions are highly treatable with access to the right medications. Left untreated or under treated, these conditions combine to cost \$23 billion in work absenteeism and account for 90 percent of the nation's suicides.

- a. This proposed change ignores the most important person involved: the patient. When a medication choice is made, it's based in part of on the patient's needs, values and preferences. Ideally, doctors and patients discuss these factors in a process known as shared decision-making (SDM). Adding a rigorous prior authorization review on top of step therapy circumvents this clinician/patient relationship and has the potential to lead to less than optimal outcomes.

2. The effectiveness and tolerability of antidepressants and antipsychotics can vary greatly among people who chose this treatment options. The best therapy for one person may be ineffective or poorly tolerated in another individual. Moreover, successful treatment frequently involves trial of several different medications in a quest to find the best treatment in terms of efficacy and tolerability. As a result, this decision is best left to the patient and the physician.

3. Convenience isn't the only reason people might prefer a long-acting, or extended release injectable over a pill. There are times these medications cannot be given orally. Certain disadvantages to oral administration are that some pills may irritate the stomach and cause nausea and vomiting; be destroyed by digestive enzymes; or have an objectionable taste or may be difficult to swallow.

When treating mood disorders, one size does not fit all. Given the wide variety of medications and the different side-effects associated with them, DBSA strongly encourages you to examine all the ramifications associated with the burden of adding rigorous prior-authorization requirements on top of step therapy for certain medical products. This proposal will be a major step backward for people with mental health conditions to obtain equitable access to medication and improved quality of care as it will increase the number of hoops they will have to jump through in order to be approved for certain irreplaceable medications.

As you review the proposal to remove medical products from the preferred drug list, we ask you to keep foremost in mind the crux of the Hippocratic Oath to first do no harm. We also encourage you to keep the focus on maximizing positive health outcomes that empower and equip people to take charge of their health and well-being and to live their life to the fullest. Increasing access to all types of medical products, regardless of delivery method, not only has the potential to support true wellness for people, but it to save lives.

We thank you for this chance to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phyllis Foxworth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Phyllis Foxworth  
Advocacy VP