

Kokua Council Position Against Restrictive Formularies

Policy

Kokua Council opposes cost containment strategies that restrict access to needed medications or other services. The Council believes that doctors and informed patients should be unhindered in making medication decisions based on doctor and patient experience, side-effect profile, and treatment guidelines.

The Council opposes restrictions because they are economically unwise, impede proper care, and increase human suffering.

Rationale for this Position

Some health plans in both the private and public sector are placing restrictions on consumer access to certain medications. Additionally, new or emerging laws or regulations in Hawaii will effectively create purchasing pools or similar mechanisms which are designed to lower the burden of high-cost medication but which may have the effect of restricting patient access to medications not found on an "official" list.

Restrictions may be warranted when they discourage the inappropriate use of medications, or encourage the use of generic equivalents. Unfortunately, limitations are often designed solely to discourage the use of newer, more expensive medications. These limitations can take the form of a restrictive formulary, in which only certain medications are covered, or a "fail-first" policy, requiring the use of older, less expensive medications before prescribing newer medications. Restrictions may also include the implementation of a prior authorization process that requires a physician to receive permission before prescribing a certain medication as well as limitations on the number of prescriptions that can be filled in a month. Such limitations can prevent optimum treatment and recovery.

Medications differ from one another in either their effectiveness in treating specific symptoms or disorders, or in their side effects. There is growing evidence that by race and ethnicity also influence medication effectiveness, thus making open access even more critical.

Prior authorization, fail-first policies, restrictive formularies, and limitations on the number of prescriptions filled per month create waiting periods that pose risks to patients and are detrimental to effective medical treatment. These policies create greater administrative burden for physicians that may influence them to prescribe the medication that is covered as opposed to the one that is most effective.

Accordingly, Kokua Council strongly opposes any limitations in the form of fail-first policies, restrictive formularies, or prior authorization processes that prevent patient access to medically necessary medications.