



News Notes

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LVBCH Employer Group Meeting (August 2020)

At the third quarter strategic employer group meeting, the Geneia team reviewed how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted utilization and health outcomes as well as employer considerations.

Healthcare utilization has declined precipitously during the pandemic. FAIR Health, as reported in the American Journal of Managed Care®, compared March 2019 and March 2020 and found a 65 percent decrease in utilization and a 45 percent decrease in professional revenue. The April comparisons showed nearly identical declines.

Data from the Theon® Platform Care Engager® Module: LVBCH Data Group showed similar decreases as the national findings:

- The paid medical claims totaled \$16.49 million in March 2020 and \$9.01 million in April 2020. For comparison, in the year before the pandemic the lowest monthly amount paid was \$18.31 million in February 2020 and the highest amount paid was \$21.93 million in October 2019.
- The monthly trend paid amount by age revealed steep declines in every group except those who are 80+ years old.
- Within specialty care, paid claims for orthopedic surgery declined the most followed by obstetrics and gynecology and then gastroenterology.
- Pediatrics showed a decrease in distinct member count of ~65 percent. An area of concern is potentially much lower vaccination levels. A national survey of 1,000 independent pediatricians by PCC, a pediatric electronic health records firm, found the administration of measles, mumps and rubella shots dropped by 50 percent early in the pandemic; diphtheria and whooping cough shots decreased by 42 percent and HPV vaccines by 73 percent.
- Primary care data showed an uptick in telehealth beginning in March 2020 with 54 visits and 137 visits in April 2020.

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Hidden health concerns are beginning to emerge. A number of national examples were discussed:

- Preventative cancer screenings dropped abruptly initially, according to research by the Epic Health Research Network: 86 percent decline in colon cancer screenings and 94 percent decline in breast and cervical cancer screening. Weekly volume from June 16 showed a recent rise in screenings, but still lower than pre-COVID-19 levels. According to National Cancer Institute Director Dr. Norman E. Sharpless, the lack of screenings and treatments could result in almost 10,000 excess deaths from breast and colorectal cancer in the next decade.
- Employee stress and mental health prescriptions have increased. An American Journal of Managed Care article reported 69 percent of employees say the COVID-19 pandemic is the most stressful time in their entire career. At the same time, there has been a 21 percent increase in the weekly fill for antidepressant, anti-anxiety and anti-insomnia medications, and 78 percent of those filled were new prescriptions, demonstrating the serious impact that COVID-19 is having on our nation's mental health.

It is suggested that HR and benefits leaders help employees through this time to address stress, anxiety and other concerns. Among the things you can do is: focus on benefits that address stress, that includes mental health benefits, employee assistance programs and financial wellness programs. Experts also say regular communication about employers' response to the coronavirus and educating employees on benefits that are available to help them are also helpful.

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