

WCRA Partners with Members to Address Chronic Pain Concerns

Since the WCRA is a reinsurer whose focus is primarily on catastrophic injuries, one might think we are not affected by the increase in chronic pain conditions. But as our members continue to experience the skyrocketing prescription drug costs associated with chronic pain conditions, an ever-increasing number of claims are being reported to the WCRA where treatment for a chronic pain condition is the *primary cost driver*. The WCRA recently analyzed over 300 of our open claims that have an identified chronic pain component. We found the average annual cost of these claims is about \$15,000–\$18,000 per year. This is the same as the costs for those workers who were diagnosed with a spinal cord injury resulting in paraplegia. We also found a majority of those claims with a chronic pain component are under the age of 50. Therefore, over the life expectancy of such claims, the ultimate costs can easily reach into the millions.

To gain a better understanding of what our members are doing to address the concerns related to chronic pain conditions, the WCRA hosted a focus group meeting in January 2010. Participants reported various **key** components to managing chronic pain conditions such as:

- ◆ Early identification of *at-risk* claims
- ◆ Early interventions such as
 - * Application of appropriate treatment guidelines
 - * Referral to a nurse case manager
- ◆ Early communication with the physician regarding the treatment plan
- ◆ Collaboration with a pharmacy benefits manager in identifying potentially inappropriate or unsafe prescribing patterns/triggers

In response to growing concerns over prescribing long-term narcotics for noncancerous chronic pain, various agencies and organizations have developed guidelines and tools to assist in managing these conditions. Below is a partial list of resources the WCRA has found helpful when assessing and monitoring these complex claims:

- ◆ Medication Treatment Parameters-Minnesota Rule 5221.6105 (NSAIDs, opioids, and muscle relaxants) (www.dli.mn.gov)
- ◆ Official Disability Guidelines : <http://www.disabilitydurations.com/>: subscription required
- ◆ American College of Occupational And Environmental Medicine Practice Guidelines: free download available at www.acoem.org
- ◆ American Chronic Pain Association Consumer Guide to Pain Medication and Treatment: free download available at www.theacpa.org
- ◆ Guidebook for Managing Chronic Pain Claims: published by WCRA and available online to eMembers

In an ongoing effort to partner with our members, the WCRA will now consider reimbursing for costs related to services provided by a nurse case manager when a specific medical need, such as a chronic pain condition, is identified. The WCRA may also reimburse for the costs associated with having a drug utilization review (aka pharmacy review) completed on the claim when certain criteria are met. These criteria include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Annual medication costs over \$12,000 per year
- ◆ Use of multiple narcotics
- ◆ Escalating dosages of narcotics
- ◆ Multiple medical providers
- ◆ Narcotics being prescribed that are not consistent with accepted treatment parameters or clinical guidelines

To ensure reimbursement, the nurse case manager assignment and drug utilization review must be discussed with the WCRA **before** a referral is made. As a reminder, the WCRA has always reimbursed our members for costs associated with specialized urine drug screen testing provided by programs such as MedTox or Ameritox.

At the WCRA, claims with a chronic pain component are referred to our catastrophic nurse consultant, Natalie Haefner. Natalie reviews these files and, in many cases, conferences with the member to make suggestions on ways to potentially mitigate or manage the chronic pain condition. The WCRA expects our members to actively manage and monitor claims with chronic pain conditions just as they would a serious or catastrophic injury. Natalie is available at #651-229-1803 or n.haefner@wcra.biz to assist our members with developing a strategic plan for these challenging claims.