

CBHNP/Blue Cross Program Recognized - 06/05/04

As part of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association's BlueWorks campaign — an effort to focus on successful programs currently at work in communities across the nation to keep quality healthcare affordable — every quarter the Harvard Medical School identifies and review initiatives introduced by the 41 independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans nationwide that have the potential to improve affordability and promote quality care.

In the first quarter of 2004, the focus was on partnerships with providers and consumers. CBHNP's northeast Pennsylvania program in Wilkes-Barre was selected as one of the programs to be recognized. Earlier this year, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association invited Blue Plans to submit descriptions of programs to improve healthcare affordability and quality currently at work in their markets. These submissions were reviewed by a faculty team of researchers at Harvard Medical School's Department of Health Care Policy. The group designed criteria for evaluation of the initiatives, which included its importance to the healthcare system, its breadth of applicability and its level of innovation. The numerous responses received in response to the Call for Applications address a wide range of challenges. The Harvard Medical School team selected six initiatives. Decision-making was difficult because many of the submitted programs were worthy of recognition.

“Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania has adopted a creative approach to address the challenge of managing care by sources outside a health plan or physician practice. Through an innovative partnership, plan members receive improved behavioral healthcare services while controlling costs. The program eliminated a potential barrier to care by not requiring a "gatekeeper" at the start of treatment and by allowing plan members direct access to the participating provider of their choice. Shared financial risks create a team environment that can better deliver quality care and eliminate obstacles to efficiency.” – Harvard Medical School Researchers.

Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania (BCNEPA) joined forces with a nonprofit health care network to form an innovative partnership that provides affordable and accessible care to patients with mental, alcohol, and substance abuse issues. The Behavioral Healthcare Provider Partnership significantly eliminated traditional barriers to quality behavioral health care, reduced costs, and improved the overall quality of services for Plan members.

The success of this partnership stems from the unique relationship BCNEPA fostered with health care providers in northeastern and north central Pennsylvania. First, by giving plan members direct access to participating providers of their choice without the need for a gatekeeper at the start of treatment, more people have received better and more efficient care. Second, preferred providers have eliminated external management of their service delivery with prospective payment and patient volume that is equivalent to or above what they received as fee-for-service providers. The partnership has produced administrative cost savings of more than 18 percent.

Pre-certifying patient access to behavioral health services is costly not only for those seeking medical services but for providers and insurers as well. Traditional models of care have made it difficult for patients to receive the services they need. That's why BCNEPA seized the opportunity to improve the quality of care by exploring creative ways to eliminate such barriers.

By contracting directly with the Community Behavioral Healthcare Network of Pennsylvania (CBHNP), the Plan aligned its financial incentives directly with the providers and assumed part of the financial risk. BCNEPA integrated administrative functions with the network to streamline operations. Participants are not subject to pre-certification requirements of a typical managed care approach. They exercise their own independent clinical judgment to treat their patients in the most cost-effective manner and without the need for external review. Administrative costs and areas of potential savings are reviewed annually and costs of care are reviewed monthly. Cost savings are identified through an annual review. For more information about the CBHNP program in the northeast, please contact Dr. Richard S. Edley, CEO. His email address is redley@cbhnp.org