Buprenorphine Agents Clinical Prior Authorization Criteria Revision

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On July 15, 2019, the Vendor Drug Program (VDP) will revise the current buprenorphine agents clinical prior authorization criteria to allow patients taking prescription benzodiazepine to receive buprenorphine agents for medication assisted therapy (MAT) treatment.

In September of 2017, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) published a Drug Safety Communication notice advising against denying buprenorphine, buprenorphine/naloxone, or methadone to patients taking benzodiazepines or other central nervous system (CNS) depressants. Buprenorphine and methadone are indicated for treatment of patients with opioid dependence, and taking these medications with benzodiazepines and other CNS depressants carries a serious health risk and may lead to death in some cases.

The FDA advises that side effects may occur as a result of combining MAT medications with benzodiazepine. However, excluding patients from MAT may lead to using outside-of-controlled-treatment settings, which could result in more severe outcomes.

Instead, the FDA advises health-care professionals take precautions and develop treatment plans when prescribing buprenorphine or methadone to patients taking benzodiazepines or other CNS depressants, and recommends the following:

- Educate patients about the serious risks of combined use
- Taper the benzodiazepine or CNS depressant to discontinuation, if possible
- Verify the diagnosis if a patient receives prescribed benzodiazepine or other CNS depressants for anxiety or insomnia, and is considering other treatment options
- Recognize that patients may require MAT medications indefinitely and their use should continue for as long as patients are benefiting, and their use contributes to the intended treatment goals
- Coordinate care to ensure other prescribers are aware of the patients’ buprenorphine or methadone treatment

VDP recommends prescribers revisit patients’ treatment goals frequently and attempt tapering benzodiazepine or other CNS depressants to discontinuation when possible.

The Buprenorphine Agents criteria guide is available online. VDP will revise the criteria by removing:

- Step 3 from the buprenorphine/naloxone criteria logic (pages 4 and 5)
- Step 4 of the buprenorphine criteria logic (pages 19 and 20)
The prior authorization for buprenorphine agents remains optional for managed care organizations.

Send questions about this change to vdp-formulary@hhsc.state.tx.us.