Palliative Care for Medicare Advantage Cancer Patients: Patient Selection and Preliminary Results

Addressing the Needs of Specific Patient Populations

**DESCRIPTION**

WellMed is a healthcare delivery network serving more than 370,000 seniors in Texas and Florida via contracted Medicare Advantage health plans. The WellMed Palliative Care program serves patients across multiple settings: inpatient, post-acute, home and clinic. As the Palliative Care program grows, we continue to seek novel methods to identify eligible patients earlier in their disease trajectory. Members with oncologic diagnoses are cared for in multiple and diverse settings, often with high symptom burden and potentially avoidable gaps in care, making earlier identification of eligible patients a priority for our program.

In December 2017, we began testing methods for upstream identification of oncology patients with high mortality diagnoses. Methods tested include insurance claims and prior authorization requests. Over the first quarter of 2018, identified patients were offered Palliative Care in our Austin and San Antonio programs. Notably, this methodology identified unique patients that had not been identified with other algorithmic approaches. As results were encouraging, the pilot was expanded to seven additional cities in second quarter 2018. All patients are offered a visit with a specialist Palliative Care clinician. After full assessment, patients may be enrolled in our home based program or specialist clinic; or return to their primary care physician if no needs are identified. We will share our experiences in the pilot and expansion phase, including rates or return to their primary care physician if no needs are identified. We will share our experiences in the pilot and expansion phase, including rates of advance care planning, improvement in symptom burden and earlier hospice enrollment.

**METHODS**

Identification of high burden cancer patients-monthly reports

- Claims based: new claims for pancreas, liver, gastric, lung, brain and metastatic disease
- Authorization based: new authorization requests for PET scans

Lists are reviewed and processed

- Chart review where available
- Remove patients from list who:
  - Moved out of service area
  - Changed insurance/physicians
  - Enrolled in hospice
  - Deceased

Remaining patients are offered specialist Palliative Care visit

Patients are evaluated and enrolled as appropriate

- Palliative Care Clinic: intermittent provider visits
- Bridges (home based Palliative Care)
  - Home visits by MD/NP, RN, SW
  - Frequency of visits titrated to patient need, may be weekly

**BARRIERS/CHALLENGES**

- Messaging to patients and oncologists
- Geography (large catchment areas)
- Staffing
- Education/training for staff in oncology specific needs
- Data collection/management

**FUTURE EXPANSION**

- Add additional diagnoses for 2019
- Educational curriculum for program staff