

Independence Blue Cross' ConnectionsSM Health Management Program: Announcing Important Enhancements

June 2003

Dear Doctor and Office Staff:

Independence Blue Cross (IBC) is pleased to announce our *enhanced* Connections Health Management Program – a program designed to help you and your patients manage chronic conditions, and to help patients make more informed decisions about certain significant medical conditions.

Disease Management and Decision Support

Our *enhanced* Connections Health Management Program will offer **Disease Management** services to patients who have one or more of the following chronic conditions:

- Asthma.
- Congestive Heart Failure (CHF).
- Coronary Artery Disease (CAD).
- Diabetes.
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

Disease Management is a process that involves identifying and supporting members of a population who have common chronic conditions. Optimal management of these conditions, with a comprehensive and integrated approach to treatment, may be associated with improved health care outcomes. The Connections Health Management Program will provide these patients with educational materials and personal health coaching from trained clinical professionals to help them learn self-care skills and adhere to the treatment plans developed by their physicians. The program will also place special emphasis on the importance of managing the co-morbidities that exist in many patients with these chronic illnesses.

Decision Support services will be offered to patients facing treatment decisions related to such conditions as back pain, benign uterine bleeding, osteoarthritis, breast and prostate cancer, and coronary artery disease. Decision Support is a process that involves identifying and supporting those members who are facing a treatment option decision, or need help with everyday health concerns. For these conditions, Health Coaches provide objective, evidence-based information to help patients understand their diagnoses, their available treatment options, and potential benefits and risks of each option, taking into consideration their own values and preferences. More importantly, they help members work effectively with their physicians to make “shared decisions” that are right for them.

The *enhanced* Connections Health Management Program will be provided on a voluntary basis, at no charge to the member.

Health Coaches: Supporting Your Treatment Plan and Helping Patients to Make Informed Treatment Decisions

Health Coaches are Registered Nurses, Dieticians, and Respiratory Therapists who are specially trained to support patients through ongoing 24-hour a day, 7-day a week telephone interactions. Health Coaches provide Disease Management and Decision Support services along with general health information to help patients understand their diagnoses and symptoms. Health Coaches use nationally recognized information sources such as the Healthwise[®] Knowledgebase and the National Library of Medicine Databases.

Health Coaches may contact you when necessary to discuss urgent clinical or care coordination issues that arise in their discussions with your patients.

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National, Evidence-Based Clinical Information: *The Basis for Connections*SM Health Management Program Services

The *enhanced* Connections Health Management Program provides objective information based on evidence from nationally recognized sources. Clinical evidence is updated annually and as new, relevant clinical information becomes available (see enclosed 2003 Connections Health Management Program Clinical Evidence). All coaching content and patient materials are consistent with this information. Upon request (using the phone number listed below), we will send you “Clinical Insight” documents – one-page summaries for each chronic condition – highlighting the areas that Connections Health Management Program Health Coaches may discuss with your patients.

In addition, a Physician Advisory Group of participating IBC network physicians will provide clinical input to the program.

Keeping Providers Informed and Connected

Primary Care Physicians who have patients with one or more of the chronic diseases in the program will receive a SMARTTM Registry claims-based report that summarizes key aspects of care. Look to our *Partners in Health* publications for ongoing program news and features. We invite *you* to communicate any feedback or concerns, request individual member information, or refer a patient for health coaching by calling the Connections Program Physician Hotline toll-free at (866) 866-4694. Beginning July 1, 2003, a Connections Provider Service Specialist will return your call within two business days. Connections Health Management Program Provider Service Specialists are available to provide information Monday through Friday, 8:30 A.M. – 5:00 P.M. If you would like to have a Connections Health Management Program representative visit your office to tell you more about the program, please call the same toll-free number listed above.

Starting on July 1, 2003, members in Keystone 65 and Personal Choice 65SM will have access to the *enhanced* Connections Health Management Program.

Your Medicare patients who are members of Keystone 65 or Personal Choice 65SM will have access to the enhanced program beginning **July 1, 2003**. Keystone 65 members currently in the CarePatterns[®] CHF and COPD disease management programs will transition to the *enhanced* Connections Health Management Program as of July 1, 2003.

Over the next six months, we will extend the program to commercial PPO and HMO members:

- Personal Choice[®] (PPO) members will be able to access program services in **October 2003**.
- Keystone Health Plan East HMO and POS members will have access in **January 2004**.

Members covered through self-insured employer groups may have different start dates. At the time members become eligible for the program, each member will receive a letter inviting him or her to call a Connections Health Coach. In addition, Health Coaches will actively reach out to members with identified clinical needs who may benefit from personal health education and support.

We look forward to your support as we implement these valuable expanded health management programs.

Sincerely,



William L. Kerr, M.D.
Vice President, Professional Networks



Esther J. Nash, M.D.
Senior Medical Director, Health Management Programs

Enclosures