FEHB Program Carrier Letter
All Carriers

Letter No. 2009-04   **Date:** February 20, 2009

Fee-for-service [3]   Experience-rated HMO [3]   Community-rated HMO [2]

Subject: Health Information Technology and Transparency

This carrier letter provides guidance on Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program health information technology (HIT) and transparency initiatives. HIT is an important tool to improve healthcare quality and efficiency, including the comparative effectiveness of certain medical treatments, and prevention of medical errors. We are pleased that FEHB carriers have made substantial progress in implementing state-of-the-art HIT capabilities and promoting transparency in healthcare cost and quality.

We expect you to continue your efforts to expand the availability of Personal Health Records (PHR), increase the number of enrollees accessing PHRs, and expand the range of information available to consumers on provider costs and provider quality. We will continue to recognize and reward carriers for the following actions: making consumers aware of the value of HIT; making PHRs available to enrollees based on their medical claims, lab test results and medication history; meeting OPM's health care cost and transparency standards; providing incentives for ePrescribing; and, ensuring compliance with Federal requirements that protect the privacy of individually identifiable health information. In addition, we strongly encourage you to work with your providers to make the clinical results of laboratory and x-ray tests available to patients through their PHRs or via e-mail direct to patients so they can upload the information to their PHRs.

Please refer to Carrier Letter 2008-16 that transmitted our *2008 FEHB Carrier HIT and Transparency Report* where we recommended carriers:

- Upgrade HIT systems, using recognized interoperability standards, to integrate clinical data into PHRs as more providers adopt electronic health records (EHR). (See recognized interoperability standards at http://hitsp.org/ and vendor certification criteria at http://www.cchit.org/).
- Increase the amount of personal health information (PHI) automatically populated in PHRs to make them easier to use and less labor intensive to create and update.
- Improve view-only PHRs by increasing functionally and allowing members to add supplemental information.

- Configure PHRs to allow members to access their information in one organized location on carrier websites.
- Promote PHR and transparency tools on the health plan's home website.
- Display HIPAA compliant Privacy Notices prominently along with PHRs and transparency tools.

In addition, we now strongly encourage you to increase the interactivity and functionally of PHRs and transparency tools by including capabilities such as:
- Recording allergies and immunizations, family health history, advanced directives, insurance information, and personal and provider contacts;
- Storing medical, facility, pharmacy, and laboratory claims data and clinical information in one location;
- Downloading and printing historical claims summaries and medication histories (including "clip boards") which can be taken to appointments for review by physicians or accessed over the internet;
- Maintaining decision support systems which determine appropriate decision support alerts and outreach for health and wellness information targeted to the member's specific health condition, such as reminders or prompts for preventive services, screenings, and prescription refills and alerts for adverse drug to drug interactions drug to condition contraindications; and,
- Managing health and wellness by allowing members access to online health risk assessments and health and wellness information targeted to the member's specific health condition, including monitoring of blood pressure, cholesterol and weight control.

FEHB contracting officers and representatives will hold discussions with each carrier on their efforts to date, current planned initiatives, and planning for future initiatives. Please provide us with written documentation on your accomplishments to date and planned initiatives by April 30, 2009. We will be looking for specific improvement with actions plans aimed at accomplishing specific targets and timelines.

Thank you for your cooperation regarding this important initiative and your commitment to the FEHB Program.

Sincerely,

Kay Ely
Associate Director
Human Resources Products and Services