



**Pathways to Managing Cancer in the Workplace:
A Meeting of Health Plans**
Summary and Highlights
Thursday April 28, 2011 12-1 p.m.

Introduction and Presentation

Pathways to Managing Cancer in the Workplace: A Meeting of Health Plans, concentrated on actions employers can take by working with their health plans to implement a full spectrum of high-quality benefits and programs for employees living with cancer and for those who are caring for family members with cancer. This webinar brought together nine health plan representatives from different organizations to share their insight and discuss the current status of cancer in the workplace, their experiences with the employer's role and the relationship between employers and health plans in terms of cancer care and management. The National Business Group on Health recently released an employer guide entitled *Pathways to Managing Cancer in the Workplace*. This guide provides employers with practical ways to support both employees living with cancer and caregivers by implementing a full spectrum of benefits and programs designed to:

- Prevent cancer or reduce its effects;
- Promote screenings and early detection;
- Provide information, decision-aids and supports to help employees navigate the complex health care system;
- Contract with providers that offer the most appropriate, effective evidence-based care;
- Encourage coordination among disability plans, employee assistance programs, health plans, behavioral health plans, pharmacy, human resources, health promotion and condition management;
- Implement cost and utilization management strategies; and
- Support employees with cancer who are returning to work, including those who may need intermittent treatment and be in and out of the workplace.

The webinar began with a presentation from Wendy Slavit, MPH, National Business Group on Health. Ms. Slavit's presentation outlined some of the key issues that employers and health plans face today in cancer coverage and management including: caregiver issues, costs, workplace burden, absenteeism/presenteeism, short- and long-term disability, treatment, prevention, behavioral health, and cancer as a chronic condition. Ms. Slavit talked about *Pathways to Managing Cancer in the Workplace* and outlined some strategies for employers with attention to collaboration with health plans, behavioral health plans, pharmacy benefit managers and employee assistance programs.

Discussion

Collaborative Care

The discussion opened by a participant asking whether treatment for depression is more cost effective or efficient if it is done in primary care by a medical oncologist or by a mental health specialist. He then went on to cite a common issue in oncology care in that a patient often becomes inundated by several different specialists, including surgeons, dieticians, radiation oncologists, and primary care physicians which can be confusing for the patient. He asked if there was a way in which this process could be streamlined. A staff member of the Business Group mentioned collaborative care, the cooperative effort of a physician and behavioral health specialist to improve care for depression.

Employee Costs, Confusions, and Concerns

A participant stated that his organization's survey, an internal survey of 900 cancer patients, stated that employees would like to have a counseling session with someone who can discuss the cost of multiple cancer services in the first few weeks of diagnosis. He claimed that confusion about potential treatment costs even overshadow some of the employee's medical concerns. The employer needs some sort of process to identify those employees quickly while also allowing the health plan to interact with them.

Another participant mentioned that employees might also have a concern about flexibility in terms of returning to work as well as on-and-off short-term disability needs that often accompany cyclic treatments.

Clinical Trials

The discussion about clinical trials began with a participant claiming that the National Business Group on Health's *Pathways to Managing Cancer in the Workplace* recommendation for employee education also provides an opportunity for educating employers by encouraging them to clarify benefit language and demystify what is specifically covered and what is not.

Another participant stated that one unintended consequence when one becomes very restrictive of clinical trials is that it results in experimental use with no accompaniment of accumulating knowledge. As we think about how to approach trials, we should also think about the unintended consequences.

A participant brought attention to the differing publication rates between national cooperative trials and industry trials; clinical trials that are a part of national cooperative agreements traditionally have a publication rate of about 69% while industry-related trials have a publication rate of about 7%. Employers and health plans want clinical trials, but it is important to make sure that they are effective trials, not trials that will be used for either marketing or commercial interests.

A Business Group staff member asked the group how an employer can best define a clinical trial benefit and what limitations should be set around that benefit. A participant said that typically, payers default to a position where they will pay for the routine care associated with a clinical trial but not the experimental drug. However, in terms of how

that gets enforced and how individuals can use that information is a little bit more nondescript. At a minimum, you want employers to ensure employees that there would be coverage of the routine costs of clinical trials.

Behavioral Health

One participant had a question about the *Pathways to Managing Cancer in the Workplace* recommendation on employer screening of employees with cancer and their families for clinical depression. The participant was uncertain if the intent of this recommendation was to ensure that all family members were screened through the health plan and what happens if depression is detected but the family member is not a member of the health plan.

A staff member of the Business Group stated that some employee assistance programs (EAPs) cover all family members in the household, regardless of whether they belong to the health plan. The EAP professional could potentially complete the screening and make a referral.

Alternative Medicine

A participant brought up the concept of integrative medicine or alternative medicine (i.e. massage therapy, acupuncture and some types of nutritional counseling) because it was not addressed in the document or presentation. A staff member of the Business Group claimed that the organization has not dealt with this as a coverage issue. However, they have recommended that employers make information available about alternative medicine options and communicate to employees about these services.