

Do Members Diagnosed with Depression Have Enough Visits with Clinicians?

Western Behavioral Health Plan (WBH), together with UPMC Health Plan, measures the percentage of members beginning treatment for a new episode of depression who are treated with anti-depressant medication and who receive at least three follow-up outpatient visits with a primary care or mental health practitioner within the first twelve (12) weeks of initiating treatment. At least one of the follow-up visits must be with a prescribing practitioner. The measure is based on a standardized national methodology contained in the Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set (HEDIS) for a measure called Optimal Practitioner Contact. Our rates are as follows:

Calendar Year	Rate
2000	33.76%
2001	37.61%
2002	42.26%
2003	42.85%

Our rate for 2003 is significantly above the national HEDIS average of 20.3%, and is the highest in the region. In addition, UPMC Health Plan's rate exceeds the 90th HEDIS percentile of 32.11%, with only two other health plans nationally having higher rates.

Although our rate has increased over the last 4 years, it is still considered low from a clinical perspective. As a result, a workgroup was formed to identify barriers to members seeing clinicians frequently enough. These include:

- Practitioners may have high caseloads and scheduling difficulties.
- Members may feel better after the start of antidepressant medication and may stop treatment prematurely.
- Members may suffer side effects that lead them to reduce or stop the medication.
- Members and practitioners may lack knowledge of treatment guidelines and expectations.

A number of steps are in place to improve our rates.

- WBH sends letters to practitioners treating members newly diagnosed with depressive disorder and encourages Optimal Practitioner Contact.
- WBH and UPMC Health Plan developed a depression case management pilot program.
- Depression treatment guidelines have been made available to practitioners.
- Care Managers prompt practitioners to schedule at least three (3) contacts within twelve (12) weeks of the start of treatment.

WBH and UPMC Health Plan will continue to monitor the rate for Optimal Practitioner Contact and will develop additional interventions as needed.