

CITY OF PITTSBURGH ASK YOUR DOCTOR...



Third Edition: Selecting a Medical Plan Carrier

Now that you're well versed on network options, let's move on to the carriers. Hopefully you've had an opportunity to attend a City-sponsored Information Session with our current carriers, Health America and Highmark, or at least have reviewed the materials they mailed to you. The best way to select the carrier that is right for you is to educate yourself. Here are a few things to think about when making your decision....

The plans look the same and my doctor is in-network (or I may switch to an in-network doctor), so how do I decide which carrier is right for me?

Carriers have different administrative styles and drug formularies.

Enter: Utilization Management (UM)

Utilization Management (UM) is defined by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) Committee on Utilization Management by Third Parties (1989) as "a set of techniques used by or on behalf of purchasers of health care benefits to manage health care costs by influencing patient care decision-making through case-by-case assessments of the appropriateness of care prior to its provision."

Some carriers have a very aggressive style of UM. It is important to understand the differences. If you switch carriers, the new carrier may require pre-authorizations you did not need in the past. Ask Your Doctor and the carriers about UM practices to determine which carrier is the best fit for you and your family.

Enter: Pharmacy Management

Effective management of medications is a necessary part of any plan that benefits both you and the carriers. Without controlling measures in place, pharmacy costs could skyrocket, which carriers would have to pass on to you.

We defined step therapy and drug formularies in our first edition and advised you to review the formularies before selecting a plan. All providers manage their pharmacy benefits differently. There are many techniques carriers use, but formulary and step therapy are the two most likely to have a visible effect on you.

For example, if you have been taking a certain prescription drug to control an ongoing condition and you switch carriers, the new carrier may:

- not include your current medication in its formulary
- require refills be for a lesser quantity
- require you try other medications before approving the non-formulary medication
- cover your current medication at a higher cost

Be sure to **Ask Your Doctor** and the carriers about your medications before you switch carriers.

How can I easily compare the carriers and plans the City is offering in 2015?

Enter: Summary of Benefits and Coverage (SBC)

Your open enrollment materials provide side by side contribution comparisons and a grid that summarizes each plan. In accordance with the Affordable Care Act, the City also posts SBCs on the CityFit site. The SBCs are designed to help you clearly and easily compare plans. A paper copy of the SBCs may be requested from the Benefits Office at any time free of charge from the Personnel Office on the 4th Floor of the City-County Building. Be sure to review these summaries before choosing a carrier.