Cigna Drops Pre-Authorizations for Opioid Addiction Treatment

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Health insurer Cigna Corp. will no longer require doctors to seek authorization before treating patients suffering from opioid addiction, a move that may help expand access to medication-assisted therapy (MAT) methods nationwide, Modern Healthcare reports.

Previously, Cigna, which has Medicare prescription drug plans in all 50 states, had required physicians to answer several questions about a patient's treatment and medication history before allowing them to prescribe certain MAT regimens. According to doctors across the country, the process could take days, ultimately leading to unnecessary costs and delays in care for people seeking addiction treatment.

The insurer's policy change will allow doctors to freely prescribe methadone, naltrexone, buprenorphine and other addiction medications without prior approval and will affect all Cigna customers enrolled in commercial plans.

The National Center of Addiction and Substance Abuse applauded the move by Cigna, calling prior authorization a "significant barrier" for people with substance abuse issues. New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman also praised the decision, adding, "Our health insurers should take notice of Cigna's actions to remove access barriers to treat opioid dependency, and I encourage those insurers to follow suit."

Coincidentally, the policy change comes shortly after Schneiderman launched an official investigation "to address concerns about barriers to treatment" at the Connecticut-based insurance company. Cigna spokespeople added that the move would also help the insurer reach its goal of reducing opioid use among its customers by 25 percent over the next three years.

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