

Health Bulletin

A New Approach To Treating Medicaid Patients

(NAPSA)—Chronic illnesses such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart failure are among the most difficult conditions to treat, not because they require dramatic, high-tech medical interventions, but because they require regular, relatively inexpensive treatments, which patients may forget or avoid.

When patients don't keep up with their treatments—often because they don't fully understand their disease and the need for regular care—they are more likely to become seriously ill and require hospitalization. This is particularly true of Medicaid patients, who frequently encounter barriers to accessing regular medical care such as lack of transportation and language or cultural barriers. Consequently, they may turn to the hospital emergency room for their routine medical needs, which dramatically increases the cost of their care.

A new, experimental health care initiative in Florida, called "Florida: A Healthy State," has been designed to address the unique needs of the chronically ill Medicaid population by improving their care and reducing the cost of that care.

"Florida: A Healthy State" is a ground-breaking collaboration between Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) and the pharmaceutical company Pfizer Inc. The program coordinates and makes the best possible use of the resources and expertise of major medical centers,



federally qualified health centers, and physicians across the state to improve the health of 50,000 of Florida's Medicaid patients with asthma, diabetes, hypertension, and heart failure, by:

- Using state-of-the-art care management software to help dedicated care managers track and coordinate patients' care to keep them healthier and reduce the number of expensive emergency room visits, and even more expensive hospitalizations;
- Providing specialized education and health training at local health centers to help patients better read and understand educational materials about their disease and treatment instructions;
- Donating Pfizer medications to the state of Florida for Medicaid patients in need.

Pfizer, with its 150 years of experience in the development of medicines and health care services, believes in the "Florida: A Healthy State" program and has

guaranteed it will save the state \$33 million. Because so much of the cost of treating this group of patients is generated by frequent visits to hospital emergency rooms and hospital stays, the only way the program can succeed is by improving the care and—just as important—the regularity of care provided to this patient population.

In order to ensure that patients receive the regular care they require, hospitals involved in the program will hire care managers who will use "smart" software developed by Pfizer, based on physicians' best practices that will give health care providers a way to identify, and focus resources on, those patients who are the most likely—without those resources—to end up in the hospital.

With hundreds of patients already enrolled, and hospitals throughout the state signing on, the program is well on its way.

Jackson Memorial Hospital, the major teaching hospital of the University of Miami Medical School, and one of the nation's leaders in the care of Medicaid patients and patients with chronic illnesses, is the first to join the program. Other hospitals throughout the state of Florida that have a high volume of Medicaid patients have also signed on, including Tampa General Hospital, Orlando Regional and Florida Hospital, and others are expected to join the program over the next several months.