

ACP

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS
INTERNAL MEDICINE | *Doctors for Adults*

Nitin S. Damle, MD, FACP
Governor, Rhode Island Chapter, ACP

481 KINGSTOWN ROAD
WAKEFIELD, RHODE ISLAND 02879
TEL. 401-789-0283
FAX 401-789-0314
EMAIL: NSDAMLE@SCIM.NECOXMAIL.COM

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Stephen Farrell
Chief Executive Officer
UnitedHealthcare of New England Inc.
475 Kilvert St.
Warwick R.I. 02886

Dear Mr. Farrell:

I am writing to discuss one essential component of health care in Rhode Island. Primary care medicine is the foundation of high quality, efficient and accessible health care. As you know, the work of internists includes the diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic medical problems, preventive health, hospital care and care coordination within the labyrinthine structure of medicine.

The health care system is in danger of losing this key component. The work force of medical students and residents seeking careers in primary care has been decreasing over the past decade and this trend is predicted to continue into the future. As our population ages through the first third of this century, there will be a potential serious shortage of primary care physicians. At present it is very difficult to retain and recruit physicians, particularly in Rhode Island, as our present physician population ages. As you are aware, primary care services have been devalued in terms of respect within the medical profession and reimbursement from payers.

The American College of Physicians (ACP) is the largest specialty organization in the United States with 125000 members nationally and 600 members in Rhode Island. The College represents internists, related sub specialists, medical residents and students. The College strongly advocates for a patient centered, longitudinal and coordinated care delivery system.

I would like to propose that UnitedHealthcare lead the effort to revitalize primary care nationally and specifically here in Rhode Island. UnitedHealthcare's efforts to promote

access, quality and efficiency should start with fair compensation for internists and their critical work. As you are aware, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Rhode Island has made a commitment to regional parity in reimbursement to primary care. They site it as “the right thing to do”, since there is no inherent reason for the present disparity. I would urge you to do the same in keeping with the above principals.

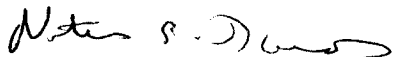
The Rhode Island Chapter of the ACP makes the following proposal:

- Reimbursement to primary care physicians should reflect the importance of issues outlined in this letter, including the challenges of diagnosis and treatment, coordination of care, preventive medicine and chronic care management.
- UnitedHealthcare should participate in a change in the model of reimbursement as proposed by the Patient Centered Advanced Medical Home.
- Establish regional parity to stop the further erosion of primary care services in Rhode Island. Reimbursement in our neighboring states for evaluation and management services is thirty to sixty percent higher than in Rhode Island.
- Promote the adoption of Health Information Technology in the form of the electronic medical record and the health information exchange. In addition, support affordability of this technology to the individual physician.

If UnitedHealthcare believes in the concept of wellness, prevention, early diagnosis and treatment for your subscribers, you must recognize primary care as the steward of this and other valued principals. This is a unique time and opportunity in medicine. It is a time for some meaningful reform in the health care system. As a major insurer regionally and nationally, UnitedHealthcare of New England has the ability to contribute to high quality and affordable health care for all Americans.

Please contact me for further discussion and questions.

Sincerely yours,



Nitin S. Damle MD FACP
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