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March 4, 2024

Dr. Kristyn Greifer  
Chief Medical Officer  
Sentara Health Plans  
PO Box 66189  
Virginia Beach, VA 23466

Dear Dr. Greifer,

On behalf of the Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, our Pediatric Council and the approximately 1300 pediatricians we represent in Virginia, we are writing to share our grave concerns regarding the re-affirmation of your policy initially enacted in 2020 that now is expanded to the children previously cared for under Virginia Premier regarding Sentara Health Plan's refusal to pay in full for services rendered. Our concern is in regard to the message shared earlier this month concerning when a preventive examination and a problem-oriented E/M service are reported on the same day for the same patient, the problem-oriented E/M service is reimbursed at 50% of the allowed amount regardless of the code appended with modifier 25. These policies will incent practices to schedule separate sick and well visits which results in additional costs, greater inefficiencies, and compromised quality. This policy will undermine the provision of convenient care for your members and may unnecessarily result in additional and more costly visits at a time when access is a challenge.

We are especially concerned regarding the existing mental health crises that are facing our children. It is often only at a preventive visit that we can routinely screen for behavioral health concerns. It is at this time that we may uncover a child with significant depression or anxiety. As pediatricians we believe it is critical that we address these issues urgently and at the time of the visit for the well-being of the child and their family. We are already under paid for the challenging behavioral health work that we do. It is unfair and unjust to additionally reduce our payment for this very difficult work by 50% strictly because these needs were identified at the time of a preventive visit. Sentara Health Plan's decision to remove appropriate payment is making our existing behavioral health crisis worse.

As we have previously shared, clinicians are struggling to bring patients into their offices to ensure well visits and vaccinations. Sentara Health Plan has requested pediatricians increase our rates for these key preventive measures and yet, for example, when a family brings in a child because of concerns of an

ear infection and we recognize they are behind on their well visits and immunizations and we make the adjustment in our schedule and our staffing to ensure we measure their growth, assess their development, hearing and vision and vaccinate them to ensure we do not miss this opportunity to provide quality care we are penalized by the very health system that is asking us to take on this extra work. Sentara Health Plan is asking us to improve our vaccination and well visits rates and yet at the same time is penalizing us for doing the double work by not paying us appropriately for the actual work that we complete is making access to preventive services worse in Virginia.

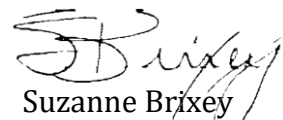
When we bring these patients in for their well visit needs and identify they are wheezing because they live in a smoke-filled home it is critical that we take the time, adjust our schedules, and treat the urgent asthma needs with medication and education while not sacrificing the preventive needs of the patient. This is addressing and prioritizing the child's health needs as they are presenting to us. Taking the time to incorporate a problem-oriented service at the time of a preventive examination will prevent the cost of a subsequent and more expensive emergency room visit. To not do so is an injustice to the child, to their family and to my role as a physician to support health. We would hope you see the barriers this policy places in the prevention work pediatricians do every day to support the health of children across the Commonwealth as a nonprofit health care organization that prides itself in supporting the health of the community.

Pediatricians deserve fair payment for the work that we do everyday on behalf of the patients enrolled in Sentara Health Plan. We expect and deserve fair treatment by your health plan.

In good health,



Kris Powell, MD  
President  
VA Chapter of the AAP



Suzanne Brixey  
Co-Chair, Pediatric Council  
VA Chapter of the AAP