Position Statement on the Impact of Step Therapy (Fail First) for Patients

The US Pain Foundation is concerned about the impact of insurer use of step therapy for pain management. While the goal of this policy makes sense to control costs, the practical reality for people with pain is often different. Step therapy policies can result in increased healthcare costs and often requires patients to endure monetary, physical and psychological distress. The Foundation receives many letters, complaints, and calls for help from the pain community. Below is some background on step therapy and our position:

- **Step Therapy for Patients with Pain**– Requires alternate medications, which in some cases includes over the counter medication, be taken before the physician recommended medication is approved for reimbursement. Patients are required to fail numerous other treatment options before the insurer will grant the patient access to the treatment option that was originally prescribed by the patient’s physician. This protocol is used as a cost-saving measure for the insurer; however, step therapy policies may lead to increased costs and the accumulation of unused medicines in home medicine cabinets. Step Therapy often sets the stage for forced “off-label” use of medications that may no longer be appropriate nor provide optimal efficacy for an individual’s medical condition. In the long run, this policy can actually increase costs for the insurer because creating a delay in care can increase resistance to treatment or cause other health complications.

According to the 2011 IOM Report, Relieving Pain in America, over 100 million Americans report pain lasting at least 24 hours. The US Pain Foundation believes a person with pain deserves as many options and treatments that are available to help improve their life with pain. We recognize that insurance companies are trying to control costs and avoid unnecessary medical interventions, but we must support a physician’s judgment in their patient’s care.

It is essential that pain survivors receive the drug treatment prescribed by their physicians and do not suffer needless consequences due to step therapy policies for pain management. Unfortunately, in too many cases, patients are forced to: pay cost-sharing for the first steps of therapy and for additional medical visits; suffer physically because effective treatment is delayed; and tolerate side effects from inadequate medicines. The US Pain Foundation finds these insurer policies unacceptable and endorses legislative and regulatory policies that put prescribing power back in the hands of physicians in charge of a patient’s care. We ask that insurance companies remove roadblocks and obstacles that prevent people with pain from receiving the appropriate and necessary pain management and treatment options they are prescribed.

US Pain Foundation is an independent nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization created by people with pain for people with pain through support, education, advocacy, empowerment and connecting.