E-Consult *Toolkit*

NEWS
August 2019

Issue Contents

Policy

CPT Code 99451 Approved by Medi-Cal for E-Consult

Medi-Cal providers now have an official CPT code for e-consult reimbursement: 99451. On August 20th, DHCS published the final updated version of the Medi-Cal telehealth policy manual and posted the August 5th All Plan Letter which provides details on Medi-Cal's e-consult policy and reimbursement. The following is the an overview of the new policy:

- E-consults are asynchronous health record consultation services that provide an assessment and management service in which the patient's treating health care practitioner (attending or primary) requests the opinion and/or treatment advice of another health care practitioner

(consultant) with specific specialty expertise to assist in the diagnosis and/or management of the patient's health care needs without patient face-to-face contact with the consultant.

- E-consults are permissible only between health care providers (cannot be initiated by patients.)

- Verbal or written consent must be obtained (can be through a general consent agreement) and must be captured in the patient's medical file.

- FQHCs, RHCs or IHS-MOA clinics may participate in e-consult but may not bill for e-consult.

The All Plan Letter "provides clarification to Medi-Cal managed care plans" for the new telehealth policy. Regarding e-consults, the APL includes the following details:

"Consultations via asynchronous electronic transmission cannot be initiated directly by patients. Electronic consultations (e-consults) are permissible using CPT-4 code 99451, modifier(s), and medical record documentation as defined in the Medi-Cal Provider Manual. E-consults are permissible only between health care providers. Telehealth may be used for purposes of network adequacy as outlined in APL 19-002: Network Certification Requirements, or any future iterations of this APL, as well as any applicable DHCS guidance."

Efficiency

In Study of Three Referral Tools E-Consult is Shown to Increase Referral Clarity

Referrals are the important first step in patient care coordination, making their clarity and appropriateness critical to care quality. A study of referral tools examines the Veterans Health Administration specialist use of three tools: service agreements, referral templates and e-consults. For the study, researchers looked to determine which of these tools support better referral characteristics.

Results from the study include the following:

- 55% who use e-consults reported that referrals were clear more than half the time.

- Among the 33% that use all three tools for care coordination tools 54% rated e-consults as very helpful.

Read more regarding specialists perceptions of e-consults and other referral tools [here](#).

Access

Integrating Behavioral Health into Primary Care with E-Consults

Facing a shortage of psychiatrists and access to psychiatric care, primary care providers are increasingly treating patients with mental health needs. Unfortunately, PCPs often feel inadequately trained for this. To aid in the in the integration of behavioral care into primary care settings, in 2017 the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center initiated psychiatric e-consults to "expand and support clinical teaching in psychiatric diagnosis…and med management strategies."

An [evaluation of PCP survey data](#) of e-consults conducted between July 2017 and February 2019 showed that they did help to support PCPs role in behavioral health care. Most questions from the PCPs regarded diagnosis, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and ADHD, and medication management.

Results from PCP satisfaction surveys, which were sent to PCP initiators one week after e-consult completions, include the following:

- 90% of PCPs agreed or strongly agreed that the e-consult improved patient care
- 95% agreed that recommendations improved their mental health knowledge and management skills
- 30% of the PCPs stated that they would have referred patients for face-to-face visits without e-consult access.

The study concludes that primary care providers are "more comfortable managing their patients' behavioral health issues due to e-consultation."

Events

Annual E-Consult Workshop, November 4th

Join us for the Annual E-Consult Workshop on November 4th in Sacramento! The 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. event will be followed by a networking reception for new and old E-Consult Workgroup members. For details, contact electronic_consult@bluepathhealth.com.

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