

#320 Mitchell Bayne

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Twenty Year Impact of Medical Society Instruments on Overcoming Barriers to Adolescent Substance Use Disorder Treatment

Objectives: The effects of substance use disorder (SUD) in adolescents are profound, but due to lack of resources, only 10-15% of those who require treatment eventually receive it. If a health plan denies a medical service, consumers in California are able to apply for independent medical review (IMR) which potentially overturns the initial denial through the California Department of Managed Healthcare (CDMHC). We assessed success of IMR appeals for SUD treatment and examined factors that correlated with obtaining care.

Methods: We analyzed trends and associations in challenged SUD claim denials in a cohort of 11-20 year olds from 2001-2021 using public data collected by the CDMHC. We used logistic regression to examine IMR ruling (upheld vs. overturned) based on patient sex, service location, and use of medical society derived tools to determine level of care (Child and Adolescent Level of Care Utilization System (CALOCUS) or American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM)).

Results: 177 patients challenged their denial of addiction treatment through the CDMHC. After an average of 39 days, 33.9% of initially denied SUD management claims for were overturned by IMR. The odds [OR, (95%CI)] of a denial being overturned did not vary by sex and was significantly greater if referencing CALOCUS [2.3, (1.03-5.0)] or ASAM criteria [2.9, (1.3-6.7)] or if requesting outpatient services [3.5, (1.4-8.6)].

Conclusion: With one third of appealed denials overturned after IMR, our study suggests that there is a tendency for health plans to inappropriately deny claims and delay treatment. Using medical society guidelines is associated with a higher probability of overturning a denial. Given the impact of CALOCUS on claim ruling, health plans should incorporate medical society tools before declining health care. Further research is needed to determine the efficacy of using medical society guidelines to obtain treatment for other mental health disorders.