

HEALTHCARE CHAPLAINCY NETWORK APPLAUDS INCLUSION OF CHAPLAINCY SERVICES IN CALIFORNIA'S PALLIATIVE CARE POLICY

NEW YORK, NY (September 7, 2016)--HealthCare Chaplaincy Network (HCCN) congratulates the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) for recognizing the valuable contribution of chaplains and the provision of spiritual care in the department's revised policy paper on palliative care services for Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

After considering stakeholder and expert feedback, DHCS published its Palliative Care Policy Paper and Beneficiary Utilization Analysis September 1, as an update to its initial paper released for comment in October 2015. It lays out the final policy for the delivery of palliative services by both managed care and fee-for-service delivery systems as authorized by SB 1004 (Hernandez, Chapter 574, Statutes of 2014).

"HealthCare Chaplaincy Network applauds DHCS for updating its policy paper to incorporate the spiritual needs of beneficiaries and specifically cite chaplains as spiritual care providers on palliative care teams. This inclusion speaks volumes for the chaplaincy profession and hopefully serves as a model for other states to follow for the good of patients and their families," said Rev. Eric J. Hall, HCCN's president and CEO.

"As an organization that continues to witness the centrality of spiritual support to the coping and welfare of ill individuals and their loved ones," he continued, "we strongly believe that these provisions will help beneficiaries make more informed choices and improve quality of life, as well as be cost-effective."

The policy proposes eight services for Medi-Cal palliative care, with two of them relating to chaplaincy. It calls for a palliative care team to meet the physical, medical, psychosocial, emotional and spiritual needs of beneficiaries and their families; and recommends that the team include, but is not limited to a doctor of medicine or osteopathy, a registered nurse and/or nurse practitioner, a social worker, and a chaplain.

In addition, it specifically calls for chaplain services, noting that managed care plans "must provide access to chaplain services as needed as part of the palliative care team." Currently, chaplain services provided as a palliative care service are not reimbursable through the Medi-Cal program.

The other palliative care services are: advance care planning, palliative care assessment and consultation, plan of care, pain and symptom management, mental health and medical social services, and care coordination.

The final paper also expands the eligible conditions for palliative care services to include cancer, congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or liver disease. DHCS cites these four conditions as “most promising for improved patient satisfaction and health outcomes, and permit cost-effective implementation.” DHCS initially proposed limiting eligibility to beneficiaries with late stage/high grade cancer with significant functional decline or limitations.

Hall said HCCN stands ready to collaborate with government officials, managed care providers, and other stakeholders to ensure that health care professionals have the appropriate training to provide high-quality spiritual care to Medi-Cal beneficiaries and others. HCCN was among the dozen individuals and groups that had provided comments on the draft policy paper.

About HealthCare Chaplaincy Network™

HealthCare Chaplaincy Network™ is a global health care nonprofit organization founded in 1961 that offers spiritual-related information and resources, and professional chaplaincy services in hospitals, other health care settings, and online. Its mission is to advance the integration of spiritual care in health care through clinical practice, research and education in order to improve patient experience and satisfaction and to help people faced with illness and grief find comfort and meaning—whoever they are, whatever they believe, wherever they are. For more information, visit www.healthcarechaplaincy.org, call 212-644-1111, and connect with us on twitter and Facebook.

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