

The Refill's In The Mail - Maybe

Stephen Kamelgarn, M.D.



In last month's issue of NCP I wrote of my bafflement over my physician's office not stocking the COVID vaccine in the middle of the pandemic.⁽¹⁾ In that screed I placed the blame for such an unacceptable level of preparedness directly at the feet of Providence Health Systems. As far as I'm concerned, given the ready availability of the vaccine, there is absolutely no good reason why every physician's office in the US doesn't stock this mainstay against COVID, and Providence has failed that particular metric.

Well, I've now found another instance of Providence Health Systems "screwing the pooch" when it comes to delivering timely care.

This time the problem is how they handle medication refill requests. I recently had to refill some medications that I've been taking for a number of years. These are stable, non-opioid, prescriptions that I must take daily for blood pressure control. Normally, I'm given enough refills to last a year, but ultimately, the year is up and either me, or more likely my pharmacy, must contact my physician's office to approve another year's worth of refills. When this happens my pharmacy faxes or emails the request to my physician's office. So far, so good. But what happens next boggles the imagination. The request, rather than going straight to my physician, gets routed to

some "central clearing area." Here, the refill request may sit for up to three days before it gets sent to my physician for the refill approval.

Now I ask, "Why, does some third party need to be involved in what is solely a transaction between my physician, my pharmacy and myself?" What idiot of a software engineer thought it was a good idea to add an extra delay to refill requests and involve at least one more person in what should be a simple transaction?

I know and understand that it can take up to three days for a refill to be approved; and that's when the request is sent directly to the physician. When I was in practice, unless I was out of the office for more than several days, I was almost always able to handle my refill approvals in one or two days; sometimes it took me three or more days, but only when I was out of the office.

Why must it take another three days before my physician ever sees the request? This is time consuming, stupid, redundant and simply senseless. It also means that it can take up to a week for refills to be approved rather than the three days it used to take.

Now, when I refill a prescription that's "out of refills" I must call my pharmacy at least ten days to two weeks early, just to make sure the refill will be ready when I need it, and have enough time to go into town to pick it up at my pharmacy.

However, with Part D Medicare drug plans unwilling to approve prescriptions even three days early, (let alone the ten to fourteen days it now takes) means that I must protest (and get "loaner" drugs from my pharmacy) for each "early" refill when I call in ten days to two weeks "early" so I don't run out of medication.

This "central collection" of refill requests is something new, ever since Providence switched from All Scripts to EPIC as the EMR for its member practitioners. I know that this isn't a glitch with EPIC, because when I worked for the Open Door System and used EPIC as my EMR, refill requests were faxed (emailed, most likely) directly to me or one of the members of my team.

Again I ask, "What moron, either with Providence or EPIC decided it would be a good idea to add yet more layer of bureaucracy to an already overburdened system?" It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. Next month, I plan on emailing my physician directly when I note my meds have no more refills. Hopefully, this will shave a couple of days off the process.

We'll see.

Notes:

1. "The Immunization Not Stocked." *North Coast Physician*, July 2022. §

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