

July 9, 2020

### **Veterans' Affairs Community Care Network**

TriWest Update: The VA has not renewed the TriWest contract for management of the Community Care Network (CCN) in Region 2 (including Florida). TriWest's role in managing authorizations for veterans' care and claims determinations was scheduled to expire on July 17, 2020, but due to COVID-19, TriWest will remain in the picture to manage its existing Veterans' authorizations until October 1, 2020.

Optum has been awarded the new VA's CCN contract for Florida (Optum Region 3. Effective July 17, 2020) will be generating 100% of the VA CCN new care authorizations and managing claims for Veterans' CCN. See [Optum Resource Page](#).

Acupuncturists interested in continuing to provide care to Veterans under newly issued authorizations, as part of the CCN, must contract/credential with Optum directly. The process is very similar to how TriWest onboarded providers and requires a CAQH identification number. To get started, you can call 800.873.4575, #1, #0, #3 – for credentialing. This process will take 6-8 weeks. To maintain continuity of care with existing VA patients, you want to contact Optum at your earliest convenience.

Frustrations continue for Acupuncture providers contracted with TriWest due to reimbursement rate changes adopted ahead of Medicare's Implementation Deadline for acupuncture coverage and the publishing of CMS' Fee Schedule on April 1, 2020. TriWest repriced all acupuncture claims for dates of service starting Jan 1, 2020 to reflect the new Medicare rate, which reduced reimbursement for care from about \$100 to approx. \$35 per unit billed.

For some claims already paid in 2020, TriWest sent providers recoup letters seeking repayment of claim amounts paid in excess of the Medicare rate and began using "offset" billing to collect overpayment of fees. Offset Billing involves processing new claims without forwarding the reimbursement amount to the provider. Instead, the payor keeps and applies all amounts owed to the provider for services rendered until the balanced "owed" to TriWest is paid in full.

TriWest's management has since made statements and committed to terminating recoup efforts on all acupuncture services provided prior to April 1, 2020: meaning that the VA Fee Schedule would be applied to all claims dated January 1 to April 1, 2020. The Medicare (CMS) Fee Schedule would be applied to those services provided after April 1, 2020.

TriWest has not produced a written policy reflecting the rate change instituted in January 2020, nor the verbal reversal of that policy in April 2020. Acupuncture providers in the CCN have a claims' appeal option in the General Provisions section of the TriWest VA CCN Provider Agreement. FSOMA has provided standard language and a template for providers to follow when filing a claim's appeal.

Veterans' Affairs and TriWest have acknowledged that reimbursement changes for Acupuncture services will be instituted in 2020. Both agree that TriWest's roll-out of these changes was communicated and executed poorly, but no company-wide or institutional policy statement has been made. FSOMA is concerned that several months have passed without a clarifying statement addressing TriWest's plan to remedy its CCN Provider Contract violations or how TriWest will solve underpayment and non-payment of acupuncture service claims in 2020. FSOMA continues to consult with the ASA, TriWest and Veterans' Affairs seeking additional information and concrete answers to this serious and complex challenge.