Tennessee Health Care Innovations Initiative: TMA Position Statement and List of Concerns

The TMA recognizes that being more efficient about the cost of health care delivery to Medicaid patients is a legitimate public health issue for Tennessee. The state Innovation Initiative’s episodes of care program, now being implemented to address health care costs in the TennCare program, presently has major flaws in design and implementation that concern our member physicians. For the time being, TMA will continue to seek representation on Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) to assist the state in aspects of the technical design of episodes of care waves. We will also continue to advocate for substantial revisions to the design and implementation of it in the TennCare program. However, until these revisions are made and tested, TMA strongly opposes expansion of the state’s episodes of care program to commercial health insurance products in the state.

TMA’s Efforts to Improve the Design and Implementation of Episodes of Care
TMA has pursued all available avenues to try to improve the episodes of care initiative for all impacted physicians.

- Staff, Insurance Issues Committee, and other leadership meetings with state officials
- Staff and leadership testimony to oversight committees of the General Assembly
- Lobbying the General Assembly for legislative reforms
- Nomination of blue chip physician specialists to the technical advisory committees
- Member advocacy during wave feedback sessions
- Innovations Initiative consultant to educate physicians and serve as a liaison to the state
- Educational programs for physicians and medical office staff
- Facilitation of medical practice administrator calls with the state and MCOs
- Hands-on instruction and counsel to gather practice perspectives to share with the state

Improvements to the Episodes of Care Initiative to Date
Advocacy by the house of medicine has resulted in some significant improvements to the TennCare episodes of care program since its inception.

- Keeping the risk-sharing portion limited to the TennCare program after the State announced plans to extend it into the commercial state employee health plan networks of major health plans. The SEHP networks will move forward with episodes of care, but with only gain-sharing opportunities.
- Obtaining a mechanism for TAG participants to be reimbursed their mileage to/from in-person meetings.
- Transparency of MCO risk adjustment methodologies
- Uniformity of cost and outlier exclusions
- Transparency of threshold levels; uniform acceptable threshold across MCOs
- Ability of quarterbacks to share data in provider reports with other providers
- Mechanism to appeal provider gainsharing or penalty classification within at least 30 days
• Identification of quality measures added to TAG responsibilities
• Delay in rollout of Wave 1 episodes of care performance period
• Procurement of outreach grant to fund a consultant to help physicians understand episodes of care and develop strategies to reduce costs
• Adjustments to provider reports (added patient date of birth and rendering provider NPI to the included and excluded episode lists)
• MCOs post provider “quarterback” episode reports onto secure portals for providers to access
• No mandatory participation in Initiative for commercial insurance in 2015, 2016, or 2017
• Only 10% of providers with highest cost episodes were subject to penalty for the 2015 performance period
• Improved recognition of the ability of MCOs to use Category II codes to track certain screenings
• 2016 law requiring the TennCare Bureau to report on all TAG recommendations and indicate whether they were acted on

List of TMA’s Ongoing Concerns about the Episodes of Care Initiative
Despite TMA’s advocacy efforts, significant concerns about the episodes of care initiative remain. Physician “buy-in” to the program has not been achieved. The program should not be expanded outside of TennCare until these issues are satisfactorily addressed and tested.

General Concerns: Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs)

• **TAGs should review episode designs before reports are issued.** Prior to preview reports being issued to quarterbacks, TAGs should review the episode design, including the list of codes included, after the MCOs have loaded their individual interpretations of the designs into their systems. There have been instances in which design elements agreed to by the TAG were either changed or translated differently than intended when the provider reports are actually issued. Those adjustments could be caught ahead of time by the TAG members. It is our understanding that HCFA is currently working to implement this process or something similar going forward.

• **TAGs should be consulted after annual feedback sessions.** Each summer, HCFA conducts feedback sessions for the episodes of care that are currently in performance periods. TAGs for those episodes should be convened as part of the wave feedback review process before HCFA responds to feedback session comments from the public. Currently, only the State, its consultant, and the MCOs review the feedback. This review does not have to be in person; it can be by electronic means.

General Concerns: Episode Design and Implementation

• **Currently, there is no formal data validation process for each episode prior to implementation.** There is a general concern in the provider community about the validity of the reports, i.e. whether the data and information in the reports are correct. There have been multiple instances where providers have identified codes included in an episode that are completely unrelated to that episode. This results in costs that are inappropriately attributed to the episode. If HCFA was required to conduct a data validation audit of each MCO’s episode design prior to the preview reports being issued, those types of design flaws could be identified. This could be a simple step where the MCOs and providers partner to validate the claims.
information that populates the report. This would give confidence in the information and to the state’s program. It is TMA’s understanding that the MCOs have agreed to do this on a case by case basis.

- **Episode of care “quarterbacks” are penalized for various costs that are out of the quarterbacks’ control.** This is the most common feedback received about the episodes program. Often, physicians do not have a choice as to the facility where they operate, either due to a contractual relationship or geography, and therefore do not have control over the facility cost that is included in the episode. Likewise, facilities have no control over the follow-up care provided to patients who have procedures performed at their facilities, even though the cost of that follow up care is included in the facility-quarterback’s episode. Philosophically, we are concerned that the episodes program will push reimbursement down to a point that is incompatible with high quality care.

- **Episode designs do not take into account regional fluctuations in cost.** Providers in very high cost regions such as Nashville are compared to providers in rural markets where costs are not as high. This is a concern of many providers. TMA would be interested in looking at the data on those quarterbacks who fell above the acceptable threshold to determine if this concern plays out. In other words, are those providers located in more high cost areas of the state, or are they spread across the various regions?

- **Each MCO has its own risk adjustment methodology as opposed to one standard.** We recommend standard and consistent methods for risk adjustment. While the MCOs use similar risk adjustment factors, such as age and certain comorbidities, the weights that they assign to each factor can be vastly different. The result is that, for a given episode of care, one quarterback provider may be considered a high cost provider for one MCO and a low cost provider for another. That should not be the case. All three MCOs now cover TennCare lives in all three regions of the state. Therefore, their patient populations should not be so different as to warrant vastly different risk adjustment methodologies.

- **Provider reports should show each risk adjustment factor attributed to each patient.** While the list of risk factors and weights are published and made available to quarterback providers, what is shown on provider reports is only the composite risk adjustment score for the patient. As a result, a quarterback provider cannot ascertain which individual risk factors were included in the composite score. It is almost impossible for quarterbacks to verify that the correct diagnoses were captured by the MCO’s claims data.

- **Access to provider reports is complex and cumbersome.** Practices have to go to multiple locations to obtain them since each individual MCO prepares reports. TMA recommends that there be one single location or platform from which to retrieve provider reports. It is our understanding that Arkansas and Ohio utilize single portals for report access in their programs.

- **The current health care system is not prepared for the transfer of data.** Many practices’ electronic health records (EHRs) in service today do not have the capacity to collect the number of diagnoses and health care maintenance codes that will provide adequate information for risk adjustment and for attribution of prevention codes that are required. The EHR tops out at a certain number of codes. Thus, many providers are not receiving appropriate risk adjustment or credit for preventive services when the number of codes exceeds the EHR’s capacity. Additionally, many provider practices do not have the necessary software or manpower to confirm through analytics that data corrections change the performance denominator, so they cannot validate whether a change made improves a provider’s performance score.
- **MCOs should share data in order for information in the reports to be complete.** The episode design cannot adjust for patients within long episode windows, such as perinatal, who move between insurance carriers or are self-pay at some point. If MCOs shared data or were required to submit data to a claims database, the data for those patients that change MCOs in the middle of an episode window would not be lost.

- **Currently, the system cannot adjust for multiple synchronous episodes**, which is where many patients fall, especially TennCare patients. Therefore, attribution is flawed, and practices are unable to identify or address where processes/costs can be improved.

- **The Initiative is not aligned with other mandated payment reform programs, such as MIPs.** Starting in 2017, physician practices that participate in Medicare will be required to submit data under the Merit-Based Incentive Program or participate in an alternative Advanced Payment Model, in addition to keeping track of the Initiative and any other quality-reporting program implemented by the various commercial health plans. If the quality reporting and episode designs for the Initiative could at least align with any federally-mandated programs, it could cut down on the overwhelming administrative burden almost all providers currently feel.

- **True quality of care cannot be captured through claims data.** Many TAG participants and other physicians have expressed concern that the episode of care program is focused almost entirely on reducing costs and does not include enough accurate measures of quality and outcomes. These concerns are primarily directed at the nature of the episode designs which are based solely on claims data.

- **Provider reports should include more information at the patient encounter level, if requested by quarterback, to help with gap analysis.** Additionally, reports should include the cost of each line item in the provider claim level detail reports to help providers identify line items for appeals.

- **Patient Centered Medical Homes and Health Homes need to be physician led.** A physician needs to be in charge of patient care. TennCare patients often have multiple chronic conditions that should be managed by a physician, even if care is not delivered by a physician during every office visit. Any licensure or accreditation standards instituted by the State should require that the clinic be physician led.