SPECIAL
COUGHLIN
JANUARY 2010
COURIER

Health Canada changes OTC drug classification

Effective January 1, 2010, Health Canada will require certain over-the-counter (OTC) drugs to be classed as either natural health products, requiring a natural health product number (NDP) or as homeopathic medicine products, requiring a drug identification number (DIN-HM).

Under the new rules, manufacturers of over-the-counter medications must include either a NPD or DIN-HM number. The DINs for existing over-the-counter products that qualify as natural health products will be discontinued. For plan sponsors, the Health Canada changes will result in some over-the-counter medications no longer being eligible for reimbursement under their group benefits program, as they will no longer have valid DINs.

Among the medications affected are: over-the-counter smoking cessation products; potassium, iron, fluoride and magnesium supplements; and non-injectable vitamins.

Life sustaining over-the-counter medications such as insulin, nitroglycerin, diabetic test strips, auto injectors and glucagons will retain their DINs and continue to be covered. As well, plans covering injectable vitamins or vitamins requiring a prescription will also continue to be covered, since they already have valid DINs.

In Quebec, products that have been assigned NPNs and considered eligible expenses under the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec (RAMQ) will continue to be covered. Products not considered eligible expenses on a drug formulary that are however considered eligible expenses under RAMQ will continue to be covered to the minimum RAMQ requirements.

Implications for plan sponsors

Plan sponsors should be aware that the new Health Canada policy could result in confusion, as products that until recently were covered under extended health care programs, may no longer be eligible for coverage.

Coughlin's position on this change is that in the immediate short term we will continue to pay claims for natural products that were formerly recognized as over-the-counter medical products until we receive specific direction from plan sponsors.

We plan to consult with our clients early in the new year to discuss options.

A list of medications now considered natural products can be found on the Health Canada website: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/prodnatur/applications/licen-prod/lnhpd-bdpsnh-eng.php