



LOS ANGELES COUNTY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
PHYSICIAN LEADERSHIP AND EXCELLENCE IN HEALTH CARE



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NATIONAL INSURANCE COMPANIES HALT REIMBURSEMENT FOR ANESTHESIA

LOS ANGELES, March 4, 2008 – Due to great opposition from physician groups, on February 27, 2008 Aetna announced that it was rescinding a policy which was supposed to go into effect April 1, 2008. This new policy would have stopped covering the services of an anesthesiologist during colonoscopy exams.

Unfortunately, other major insurance companies have stopped covering anesthesia during colonoscopies. WellPoint/Blue Cross of California was the first to implement a policy which denies patients undergoing colonoscopy the routine services of an anesthesiologist to provide sedation when their gastroenterologist requests such. More recently, Humana also implemented a similar policy.

A colonoscopy is the most cost-effective and life-saving screening examination done in medicine today says Dr. Maurice Gourджи, a Los Angeles area gastroenterologist who performs almost 1,000 of these procedures a year. “I am concerned that patients who have policies which do not routinely cover the services of an anesthesiologist during colonoscopy will be discouraged from having this potentially life-saving screening examination,” states Dr. Gourджи. “Even Medicare covers the services of an anesthesiologist during colonoscopy.”

“It’s highly unusual for insurance companies to refuse to pay for procedures that are covered by Medicare,” says Dominick Spatafora, CEO of the Los Angeles County Medical Association. “If the insurance companies can get away without paying for the services of an anesthesiologist during a colonoscopy or endoscopy, then it opens the door for them to refuse to pay for other services that a doctor may deem important for a patient.”

“Colonoscopies are crucial for early detection of colon cancer,” says Dr. Jeffrey B. Glaser, a Los Angeles area anesthesiologist. “In many areas of the country – including California – gastroenterologists frequently consult the services of an anesthesiologist to provide sedation during colonoscopy for their patients.” Therefore, says Dr. Glaser, “this practice has become the standard of care and insurance companies are taking away this important benefit for purposes of their own financial gain.”

The Los Angeles County Medical Association supports positions taken by the California Medical Association, American Society of Anesthesiologists, California Society of Anesthesiologists and the GA Alliance which oppose policies whereby third party insurance carriers make decisions regarding the determination of medical necessity. These decisions should be made by licensed physicians directly involved in a patients' care.

About LACMA

The Los Angeles County Medical Association is a professional association representing physicians from every medical specialty and practice setting as well as medical students, interns and residents. For more than 100 years, LACMA has been at the forefront of medicine, assuring that its members are represented in the areas of public policy, government relations and community relations. Through its advocacy efforts in both Los Angeles County and with the statewide California Medical Association, physician leaders and staff strive toward a common goal—that doctors may spend more time taking care of patients and less time worrying about the hassles inherent to dealing with third-party payers, administrators, regulators, reviewers and anybody or anything else that intrudes upon the physician-patient relationship.

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