



DC Medicaid plan launches diabetes texting pilot

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By Brian Dolan

Washington, DC-based Medicaid managed care organization, D.C. Chartered Health Plan, is rolling out a pilot text messaging program for members with diabetes. The Medicaid plan is providing 50 of its members with the free messages, which will include tips about living with diabetes, as part of a broader program that includes in-person visits.

The texts aim to encourage patients to schedule annual appointments and get annual eye and foot exams in an effort to avoid unnecessary trips to the emergency room. The texts also include tips for taking medication “appropriately” and other tips for lifestyle changes that would benefit their health. The texts are not all one-way, however, some are interactive quizzes and others are announcements for community events.

In the future, Chartered hopes to expand the program if it proves successful. The plan expects to develop support groups for various diseases, send disease-specific messages, and personalized messages like appointment reminders.



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[Last year George Washington University Hospital partnered with Chartered Health Plan](#) on a pilot of WellDoc’s DiabetesManager. In December 2011 MobiHealthNews reported that Dr Katz had presented findings of a demonstration program called DC HealthConnect at the mHealth Summit in Washington DC. The program tested WellDoc’s mobile health program DiabetesManager during a 12-month period. The results: DiabetesManager reduced ER visits and hospital stays by 58 percent on average compared to the previous year — when they weren’t using the program.

“Our goal is to leverage mobile technologies and smart networks to improve the well-being of our community,” Chartered executive Karen Dale stated. “We’ve been committed to improving the quality of care, reducing costs and creating a healthier community for the past 25 years, and will continue to take advantage of new opportunities to solve Washington’s most critical health and social challenges.”

More in the press release below:

WASHINGTON, April 9, 2012 – D.C. Chartered Health Plan, Inc., the oldest Medicaid managed care organization in the District of Columbia, is launching a new text messaging program for 50 of its members to help them better manage diabetes, which requires regular care to avoid costly complications. This program enables participants to receive brief tips about living with diabetes, a disease that disproportionately affects the community, as part of a case management program that also includes face-to-face support.

Research shows that people who actively participate in their care can more effectively manage chronic diseases such as diabetes. In many cases, however, particularly in the neighborhoods Chartered serves, people with diabetes find it difficult to understand and manage the disease. The new program provides a different avenue for education.

“Mobile health is the wave of the future for improved management of chronic disease,” said Richard Katz, M.D., director of the division of cardiology at the George Washington University Hospital, which previously partnered with Chartered Health Plan on a similar program. “It can be extremely popular with diabetes patients and result in reduced emergency room visits and hospitalizations.”

Diabetes affects local residents at substantially higher rates than in other areas of the country. In 2010, 10.9 percent of adults in the District received a diabetes diagnosis, compared with only 8.7 percent nationwide, and death rates associated with the disease are also disproportionately higher. Poorly managed diabetes can lead to complications such as blindness and foot problems, often leading to costly emergency room visits that could be avoided.

“This program connects our diabetic members to the real-time support they need,” said Karen Dale, an executive at Chartered Health Plan. “Through this and other innovations, we’re opening doors to good health for those who need it most in our community.”

Bridging the gap through text messaging

For years, Chartered has sought to keep members with diabetes engaged in their care through regular telephone calls and mailings, as well as face-to-face interaction with members. By adding a text messaging element, Chartered is expanding the impact of this effort and enabling members to play a more active role in the management of their disease.

The program encourages members to avoid unnecessary emergency room visits and instead, to schedule annual appointments with their primary care providers as well as get annual eye and foot exams. It also helps people take their diabetes medicines appropriately and make lifestyle changes to better support their health.

Participants in the program receive tips and messages on various topics, including when to contact a doctor, nutrition tips and diabetes-related information. The text messages also include interactive quizzes and announce community events to keep participants involved.

Future plans

The program will be evaluated later this year with an eye toward potential expansion. It is part of Chartered’s commitment to transform health care in the District. Building on its secure cell phone technology platform, Chartered ultimately hopes to create support groups for various diseases and send other disease-specific messages and personalized messages, such as appointment reminders, to its members.

“Our goal is to leverage mobile technologies and smart networks to improve the well-being of our community,” said Dale. “We’ve been committed to improving the quality of care, reducing costs and creating a healthier community for the past 25 years, and will continue to take advantage of new opportunities to solve Washington’s most critical health and social challenges.”

About Chartered Health Plan

As the oldest Medicaid managed care organization in the nation's capital, Chartered Health Plan, Inc. is the most comprehensive resource for local residents with serious health conditions. Chartered opens doors to good health for those who are most at risk, facilitating care to more than 100,000 people who are Medicaid-eligible or uninsured, who would otherwise have limited access to the care they need.

Chartered recognizes that good health also depends on addressing a number of social factors, such as employment and a stable and safe living environment. That's why Chartered cares about the "whole person," offering innovations that address these factors and empowering members to become actively engaged in their care. The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) awarded Chartered an accreditation status of commendable for service and clinical quality that meet NCQA's rigorous requirements for consumer protection and quality improvement.