Policy Regarding E-Mail Communication with Patients

Recently, an area medical group asked about the Excellus BlueCross BlueShield and RIPA policies on payment for communicating with patients via e-mail. The following describes the current guidelines regarding e-mail communication with Blue Choice members:

1. Practitioners may create practice policies regarding charging patients for e-mail communications. However, e-mail communications are currently considered an excluded service under the contract between Excellus BCBS and RIPA, and for other Excellus BCBS products as well.

2. The requirements you must comply with in order to charge for e-mail communications are complex. Confidentiality is one major concern. Please review the current standards of practice before initiating an e-mail correspondence policy for which you will charge your patients. Two excellent summaries are the AMA Guidelines for Physician-Patient Electronic Communications (www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/printcat/2386.htm) and E-encounters by the California HealthCare Foundation (www.chcf.org).

3. The approach to this type of communication is evolving rapidly. Both Excellus BCBS and RIPA will continue to assess this technology and will keep you informed of our progress in this area.

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