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THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1200

10 Sept 97

MEMORANDUM FOR: ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (M&RA)
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (M&RA)
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE (MRAI&E)

SUBJECT: Policy for TRICARE Prime Travel Access Standard for Specialty Care

Recent congressional and beneficiary inquiries have prompted us to address the Prime enrollee access standard for travel time for specialty care outlined in 32 CFR 199.17. This policy memorandum is to clarify that, in geographic areas where Prime has been established, travel time for inpatient and outpatient specialty care for Prime enrollees shall not exceed one hour under normal circumstances, unless a longer time is necessary because of the absence of providers (including providers not part of the network) in the area.

An analysis done by Region Nine indicates that the normal driving time to specialty care providers (network providers and MTFs) from the residence of some Prime enrollees exceeds the one hour travel standard because of traffic congestion and circuitous routes that beneficiaries are required to travel. The Managed Care Support (MCS) Contractors have been using the Catchment Area Directory (CAD) of postal zip codes in determining whether Prime beneficiaries should be given appointments at MTFs for specialty care. The CAD is to be used for determining the necessity of issuing Non-Availability Statements (NASs) for TRICARE Extra and TRICARE Standard beneficiaries only. It should not be used to determine specialty care in MTFs for Prime beneficiaries.

Each region should work with their managed care support contractor to identify potential zip codes that exceed the access travel time for Prime enrollees for specialty care appointments. Those zip codes identified as potentially exceeding the one hour travel access standard should be annotated in the system used by the TRICARE Service Centers to make specialty care appointments for Prime enrollees. Since not all Prime beneficiaries within the identified zip codes may be affected, further development between the TRICARE Service Centers and individual beneficiaries may be necessary to make an accurate determination. It is possible for a postal zip code to be outside the travel access standard for Prime enrollee specialty care but be within the catchment area of the MTF for Extra and Standard beneficiaries.

The point of contact for this matter is Ms. Marcia Bonifas at (703) 614-4705, DSN 224, or e-mail to mbonifas@ha.osd.mil.

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