AUG 16 2010

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

AUG 10 2010

Edward P. Balaban, DO
President
Pennsylvania Society of Oncology and Hematology
777 East Park Drive
Post Office Box 8820
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17105-8820

Dear Dr. Balaban:

Secretary Harriet Dichter asked me to respond to your letter of July 16, 2010, requesting that the Department of Public Welfare (Department) reconsider its decision to have the Pharmacy & Therapeutics (P&T) Committee review oral oncology medicines during the August 26, 2010, P&T Committee meeting. The Oncology Agents, Oral class of drugs will not be reviewed during the P&T Committee meeting. Since posting the draft agenda on our web site, the Department completed its pre-meeting preparation and analysis of this class of drugs and a decision was made not to add this class of drugs to the Department's Preferred Drug List (PDL) at this time. As a result, the Medical Assistance (MA) Program continues to cover all Oral Oncology Agents without a requirement for prior authorization. Despite this determination, I would like to take this opportunity to explain the Department's PDL and provide an assurance of availability of drugs for MA Program consumers when medically necessary, even drugs designated as non-preferred.

The Department's PDL is clinically based, meaning that drugs are added to the PDL based upon the clinical recommendations of a P&T Committee comprised of physicians, pharmacists, Department clinical staff, MA Program consumers and advocates, with medical specialists, such as oncologists, included as needed to address specific therapies or drug classes. The P&T Committee is designed to ensure an unbiased clinical perspective and acts in an advisory capacity to the Department. After listening to public testimony by drug manufacturers and other interested parties regarding the class of drugs under consideration, this panel of experts reviews drug monographs which include a review of the available published, peer-reviewed clinical literature to present an accurate, balanced picture of the relative clinical strengths and weakness of each drug within a therapeutic class. The Committee then determines which drugs are best in a particular class based upon clinical effectiveness, safety and outcomes. When all drugs within a class are therapeutically equivalent, cost, including manufacturer rebates, is considered. Upon approval by the Secretary of Public Welfare, those drugs are determined the preferred drugs. The PDL is not a closed or restrictive formulary. All other drugs covered by the MA Program remain available when a consumer needs them. These drugs are designated as non-preferred and require prior authorization.

We appreciate hearing the clinical concerns you raised in your letter. Thank you for your interest in the MA Program and for your members' efforts to provide quality care to MA Program consumers.

Sincerely,

Michael Nardone
Deputy Secretary

cc: Ms. Harriet Dichter, Secretary, Department of Public Welfare
Jolene H. Calla, Esquire, Director, Bureau of Fee-for-Service Programs