



KwaZulu-Natal Doctors Healthcare Coalition

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GEMS Medical Scheme's Controversial Benefit Allocation Puts Chronic Patients at a Disadvantage

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GEMS Medical Scheme's Controversial Benefit Allocation Puts Chronic Patients at a Disadvantage

Durban, 6 June 2023 - GEMS, one of South Africa's prominent medical schemes catering to public sector workers, is facing scrutiny over its benefit allocation policies. In particular, concerns have been raised regarding the scheme's approach to Prescribed Minimum Benefits (PMB), which has placed chronic patients in an unfair position compared to members of other schemes.

Prescribed Minimum Benefits, as defined by the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS), are comprehensive benefits that must be paid in full by medical schemes. These benefits encompass treatments for chronic conditions such as diabetes, including visits to doctors, necessary tests, and other related expenses. The CMS mandates that all costs associated with PMB should be covered entirely.

However, GEMS has chosen to deplete patients' acute benefit instead of establishing a separate PMB benefit. In contrast, other medical schemes, such as Discovery, have dedicated PMB benefits distinct from acute benefits. Acute benefits are intended to cover costs related to acute conditions, such as back pain, infections, or emergency room visits, as opposed to ongoing chronic care.

As a result of GEMS' benefit allocation model, patients with chronic conditions face a dilemma. They are reluctant to manage their chronic conditions appropriately due to the fear of depleting their funds and having to pay out-of-pocket for essential acute visits. This places GEMS' chronic patients at a significant disadvantage compared to members of other schemes.

The inequitable treatment of chronic patients within GEMS has raised concerns about the scheme's commitment to providing comprehensive care and support to its members. It undermines the principle of equal access to healthcare and leaves vulnerable individuals without proper management of their chronic conditions.

We call upon GEMS to reconsider its benefit allocation policy and align it with the CMS guidelines and industry standards. By establishing a separate PMB benefit, GEMS can ensure that chronic patients receive the necessary care without compromising their acute healthcare needs. This step would

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promote fairness, improve health outcomes, and alleviate the burden on those battling chronic illnesses.

Additionally, we urge the CMS to review the benefit allocation practices of all medical schemes, ensuring that the allocation aligns with the intent of PMB guidelines. By fostering a standardized approach across the industry, the CMS can protect the interests and well-being of all medical scheme members, regardless of the scheme they are enrolled in.

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