

I'm a nurse at a community mental health clinic. In the past week, four patients (children) have been denied risperidone. This medication has treated anger, outbursts, aggression towards others, and self-harm successfully for many years.

Prior Authorization forms are required for this medication for children with Iowa Medicaid or MCO insurance. Myself and other nurses have completed the PA's, have made phone calls, and have recently submitted appeals, however the medications are being denied for insurance coverage (the appeal decision has not been determined as of this writing).

The reason for the denial is that the medication is being used with another anti-psychotic medication (namely aripiprazole, which recently became a preferred medication). The other reason is that the children are not diagnosed with an FDA approved diagnosis of; schizophrenia, bipolar, or autism.

Risperidone has long been used as an additional or primary medication for treating anger and aggression in children who are diagnosed with mood disorders, oppositional defiant disorder, anger associated with autism, and sometimes for symptoms of ADHD. Only recently, has the diagnosis code become so strict for this medication, that it is not being approved to treat these symptoms. Prescribers are hesitant to diagnose children with schizophrenia and bipolar due to the consequences of those labels, and the fluctuation of symptoms as the child ages.

Why? Twice this week, I have taken the brunt of very angry caregivers who have not been able to get this medication from the pharmacy for their children. These children have been taking this medication for years and it has helped to make their symptoms manageable. Example 1: caregiver believes she will need to take her child to the emergency room due to his self-harm. Example 2: parent is afraid that her older symptomatic (autistic) child is a danger to the other children in the home, and a residential facility is being contemplated for this reason. Both of these children's symptoms had been much better controlled while taking risperidone, but they have not had the medication for weeks due to insurance denying coverage. As stated before, appropriate prior authorization forms had been submitted, and denied.

Additionally, risperidone is an older, and inexpensive drug-there is no financial reason for Iowa Medicaid, Amerigroup, or United Healthcare to refuse payment for this effective drug.

It is not only this medication, but other medications that have been being used successfully for years, that are being denied. Today I received a denial on a medication that is on the preferred drug list. What is going on!?! Our community health center has 4 full-time nurses and we treat roughly 5,000 patients per year-we do not have the time to spend on submitting PA's, getting denials, re-submitting PA's, and then submitting appeals. Appeals can take 30 days to be answered-patient's do not have the luxury of this time either, due to their severe symptoms.

I love my job and the demographic served, but left today feeling DEFEATED! People come to us looking for help, we offer them the help, then it get's pulled out from under their feet, because Iowa Medicaid and the MCO's refuse to pay for the treatment.

Is it believed that this will save money? I see more emergency room visits and harmful behavior with serious consequences in the future if this continues.