



Independent Medical Review

A New Tool for Health Care Dispute Resolution

The California Department of Managed Health Care has launched a new Independent Medical Review program, giving patients who have been denied treatment or medical care an opportunity to have those decisions reviewed by physicians or other appropriate medical professionals who have no affiliation with their health plans.

The Independent Medical Review program is administered by the Department's HMO Help Center, and provides patients with an impartial review of:

1. Health plan denials, delays, or modifications of services based upon the finding that they are not medically necessary.
2. Health plan denials of experimental or investigational treatment.
3. Health plan denials of reimbursement for emergency or urgent medical services.

The Independent Medical Review considers patients' medical records, health plan denial and grievance letters, supporting documentation from the patient and treating physician(s), and other appropriate documents when making a decision. The health plan must comply with the decision of the Independent Medical Review, and the Department of Managed Health Care will enforce the decision when necessary.

If there is an imminent and serious threat to their health, patients may request an expedited Independent Medical Review. These requests are referred to a nurse at the Department who determines whether the medical condition meets the expedited review criteria.

Patients pay no application or processing fees for the review. However, in most circumstances, patients are required to participate in the health plan's grievance process first.

The Department's HMO Help Center also assists patients who have other problems with their health plan, including issues regarding medical coverage or benefits, denials of payment, access to care, and termination of coverage.

The Department has developed an on-line database of Independent Medical Review decision (excluding patient, provider or facility information) since the program was put into effect on January 1, 2001. Searches can be conducted by diagnosis or treatment category.

For more information about the Department of Managed Health Care, the HMO Help Center, or the Independent Medical Review Program, visit their web site at www.hmohelp.ca.gov or call (888) HMO-2219. ■