

Dental Partners of Georgia

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Many Georgia dentists are facing the economic uncertainty of our time as Georgia struggles with job layoffs and reduced tax revenues. Working with patients and their insurance companies has become increasingly challenging. Our greatest challenge is contracting with the Medicaid CMOs. Medicaid providers have certainly seen significant swings in reimbursement and plan administration, especially over the last 3 years.

In the words of one of your colleagues, "Being a pediatric dentist, I serve the population of child patients with some of the worst dental conditions. As recently as a couple of months ago, out of the blue, I received a phone call from WellCare stating my practice had been terminated as a provider, effective in 30 days. WellCare patients represent approximately 40% of my patient base! One week later, I was contacted again by WellCare, stating my practice was temporarily reinstated in the network, until further notice."

As it turns out, there were approximately 21 practices representing 56 dentists that received the same termination notice from WellCare. The terminations were stated as being "without cause." It is difficult to believe that any dentist could have the care of their patients and their personal livelihood taken away in an immediate and abrupt manner. These terminations clearly indicated that any dentist who has been a loyal Medicaid provider for years could literally be shut down and out of practice overnight. Dentists are concerned that the CMOs will continue their quest for provider terminations and, more importantly, that the terminations may not be limited to WellCare. What other profession allows for this? Hopefully, your practice will not be the next practice to receive this devastating news.

Unfortunately, dentists find themselves in this predicament because the contracts that dentists signed with the Medicaid CMOs allowed it. For most dentists, contracting with the CMOs was the very first foray into managed care. It is painfully obvious that most dental providers were overmatched in dealing with the team of contractors, negotiators, and lawyers unleashed by the CMOs.

Several months ago, an independent provider organization called **Dental Partners of Georgia (DPG)** was formed by dentists from across the state. DPG was formed to assist its members in navigating the ever-changing managed care environment, to secure continued access to quality dental care for our patients, and to provide other relevant benefits to members. By pooling our resources, we now have access to the same level of expertise that the payors have.

Managed Care is an industry which filters billions of dollars through payors. These payors have their own actuaries, lawyers, marketers, and contractors whose sole responsibility is to resolve how to make money off the care that providers deliver to patients. None of these payors will ever set foot in a practice and deliver care and, conversely, dentists cannot continue to independently wander into the payor arena and expect that they will come out on the other side with any positive impact.

Effective June 1, Peach State patients will be administered by Doral. Since it is logical to assume that all dentists received notification, you understand the impact that this will have on your practice. It is well documented that the stimulus funds that Georgia received allowed the state to forgo any provider cuts to the hospital /medical/dental Medicaid fee schedule. Logically, we can all assume that the CMOs received no reductions from the state. **WHAT THEN IS HAPPENING IN YOUR PRACTICE?**

The benefits of joining DPG are outlined on the DPG website, www.dentalpartnersga.com. Specifically, one benefit is DPG's business partnership with Henry Schein that offers DPG members a minimum 18% discount off their published catalogue pricing. In addition, Schein is seeking other DPG purchasing discount arrangements with other dental suppliers such as Colgate. These discounts could pay the organization membership fees many times over!

The cost to join the group is \$1,500. Timing is critical! Act now to join DPG before more unpleasant changes are upon us.