

What You Should Know About Managed Care

An important part of your therapy is your informed consent. In order to make an informed choice, please review the following disclosure statement, which addresses the accessing of Managed Care (HMO and PPO) benefits for mental health counseling .

You Must Be Diagnosed with a Mental Disorder

According to all managed care plans, psychotherapy can only be provided and will only be paid for by the insurance company if it is deemed “medically necessary”. This means that you **MUST** be diagnosed with some kind of mental disorder for the managed care plan to pay for therapy. This puts the therapist in an ethical bind whereby he or she may be inclined to “make up” or “guess” at a diagnosis, when the client may not have one. Additionally, most managed care plans **DO NOT** pay for marriage counseling, parenting issues, difficult life transitions such as grief work, stress management, self-esteem, work-related and other issues for which many people seek counseling.

Risk to Your Future Health/Life Insurance or Employment

Mental health diagnoses are considered “pre-existing conditions” and are often the basis for being denied health or life insurance coverage in the future. A history of having a mental health diagnosis in your health record may also impact your (or your child’s) ability to obtain certain jobs (e.g. government, law enforcement, military). In some cases, your current employer may also be granted access to information contained in mental health records by the managed care company; information which could later be used against you.

Your Private Life on the Internet

All managed care plans involve direct clinical management by the plans’ case managers. Managed care staff can ask your therapist extremely detailed and intimate questions about your therapy sessions in order to approve treatment. This highly confidential information is then entered into the company’s computer, and can be easily accessed by numerous people within and outside the managed care organization. Many companies are now outsourcing the processing of medical records to countries outside the United States, allowing even more people to have access to your private health information. It can also be shared with other insurance companies as they are sold or merged. Therefore, medical information that is entered into large company computer networks can more easily become public information and may be abused, especially given the rise in computer hacking in recent years. The important question is whether you want to risk your private life (marital or family problems, drug or alcohol abuse, depression, anxiety, or the like) being accessible on the Internet. Unfortunately, there is no way to tell exactly where the information in your medical record will go or how it will be used once it leaves your therapist’s custody.

For all these important reasons, consider paying out of pocket for your psychotherapy. Tending to your relationships, marriage, family, health, and well-being is too important to leave in the hands of managed care companies. Only private, self-pay therapy assures that what you discuss in therapy remains completely confidential, eliminates the need for you to be diagnosed with a mental illness in order to be covered, and increases the likelihood that you will get the help that *you and your therapist*, NOT the managed care plan, decide best meets your needs.