How to Choose the Right Health Plan on the Exchange as a Patient with COPD

This is Chris, a 55-year-old living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Chris suffers from shortness of breath and coughing. COPD typically worsens over time, so finding the right healthcare plan is essential. Chris is shopping for insurance coverage through the health insurance exchange. Here are some factors informing the decision.

Chris has 2–3 COPD exacerbations per year and has been to the hospital for an overnight stay once in the past year.

There will be multiple doctor visits in the coming year...

2–3 Episodes/Year
8 Visits
2 Visits

General Practitioner
Specialist

... and a three-day hospital stay in the middle of the year.

3 Days

Statin
Aspirin
Beta Blocker
2 COPD-Specific Inhalers
Nitroglycerine
Bronchodilator

After hospitalization, Chris also takes

Antibiotic
Prednisone
Chris qualifies for cost-sharing reduction (CSR) subsidies. CSRs lower the amount enrollees have to pay for a plan’s deductible, coinsurance, and copays. Chris compares a silver plan with reduced cost sharing and a bronze plan with premium subsidies at 150% of the federal poverty level (FPL).

Next, let’s imagine that Chris’ income is a little too high to qualify for CSRs but does qualify for a premium subsidy (FPL 250%).

Here’s a look at which month Chris will reach the deductible and MOOP with those same plans:

Chris has a lot to consider! Premiums are paid each month to be enrolled in a health insurance plan. Deductibles are paid for covered services before the plan begins to pay. The maximum out-of-pocket (MOOP) limit is the cap on out-of-pocket costs paid by the patient for covered services in one year. There are so many options it can be hard to know what’s best.

The four metal categories are based on how patients and the plan split the costs of health care. In Chris’s scenario, the gold plan has the lowest total yearly spending. Gold plans typically have high monthly premiums paired with low cost sharing, spreading his costs out over the year. The bronze plan, which has low monthly premiums paired with high cost sharing, also would have been a good choice for Chris.

Lesson

Even though the bronze plan has no premium, Chris should pick the silver CSR plan. Total yearly spending for this plan was much lower than the bronze plan.

Lesson

When choosing a health plan, consider all of the factors that can affect yearly out-of-pocket costs, such as the premium, deductible, and copay or coinsurance amounts. Also, it is important to check plans’ coverage for doctors and medications.

Bottom Line:
Patients with COPD who have high-cost health needs, like Chris, are likely to reach the MOOP. Adding the total premiums to the MOOP should give these patients an estimate of total yearly costs.