

AmeriHealth Caritas Delaware

Provider Bulletin

On February 1, 2019, alprazolam (Xanax) will become non-preferred for all Delaware Medicaid members in both managed care organizations (MCOs) and fee-for-service. Division of Medicaid & Medical Assistance (DMMA) members with a history of alprazolam use within the last 60 days in their drug profile will have a prior authorization created to allow adequate time for an assessment. Providers may want to take this opportunity to discuss other treatment options with the member. This period can also be used to taper the dosing.

The following is the communication from the Delaware Drug Utilization Review (DUR) Board:

Along with the opioid epidemic, Delaware faces a crisis with deaths related to the use of benzodiazepines. During 2019, DMMA will focus drug utilization review programs and policy changes to address the challenges created by the over-prescribing of the medications in this class. The first initiative will focus on alprazolam.

- Alprazolam is a high-potency triazolobenzodiazepine indicated for treatment of generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder. Although it has been shown to be an effective treatment for these conditions, safer and equally effective alternatives can be chosen from among the antidepressants. Alprazolam, too, is often used off label for other types of anxiety or for depression, conditions in which effectiveness and safety have not been demonstrated.
- Alprazolam's pharmacologic properties attribute to its increased misuse potential:
 - More severe withdrawal symptoms after a shorter period of use.
 - Rapid absorption and onset.
 - Low lipophilicity.
 - Short half-life.
 - High potency.
 - Therefore, severe withdrawal symptoms after a shorter period of use.
- Alprazolam is the most widely prescribed and misused benzodiazepine in the United States.
- Based on national emergency room-visit data, alprazolam is the second most common prescription medication and the most common benzodiazepine to be involved in ER visits related to drug misuse.
- Alprazolam is one of the most toxic benzodiazepines when overdosed and its use should be avoided in patients at increased risk of suicide, or who are using alcohol, opioids, or other sedating drugs.
- The combination of benzodiazepines with opioids doubles the risk of respiratory depression and death and should be avoided.

Source: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5846112/pdf/nihms947341.pdf