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Contact: Ashley Bearden
501.612.4182
Email: ashley@impactmanagement.com

ARKANSAS GOVERNOR SIGNS STEP THERAPY BILL INTO LAW

SB99 BECOMES ACT 97, PROVIDES PATIENTS ACCESS TO CRITICAL MEDICATIONS

SB99, a bill intended to protect patients from a potentially harmful insurance practice known as step therapy or “fail first” has officially been signed into law as Act 97 by Governor Asa Hutchinson. The law marks a historic and life-saving measure for Arkansans that will improve access to medications by eliminating delays to necessary treatment.

“We are incredibly thankful for the hard work by Senator Bledsoe, Representative Vaught, Senator Wallace, Senator Irvin, and Representative Lundstrum to pass this important legislation,” said Laura Barganier, Multiple Sclerosis Clinic Director at UAMS. “Step therapy protocols have negatively affected my patients and my ability to care for them, resulting in long term costs to my patients, their families, and society at large.”

Arkansas now joins more than two dozen other states including Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana, that have already enacted similar legislation to put protections in place around the use of step therapy.

“This legislation is about improving quality of life,” said Tammy Jones, the Arkansas Rare Action Network Volunteer Ambassador for the National Organization of Rare Disorders. “Patients and caregivers have enough on their plates, and now they’ll face one fewer hurdle in accessing the prescription medications they need.”

Act 97 will require reasonable timelines for exceptions requests and appeals, ensure that when implemented, step therapy requirements will be based on medical and clinical guidelines, and not require patients to try and fail on medications they have already taken or that are not in their best medical interest based on their personal medical history or condition. It also will not prohibit health insurers from continuing to employ their own step therapy protocols or interfere with Arkansas’ existing generic substitution laws.

“Doctors know what is best for their patients, and that’s why patients, volunteers, and physicians like myself across the state fought hard for this law to come to life,” said Dr. Michael Saitta, president of the Arkansas Rheumatology Association. “We are grateful to the legislature and Governor Hutchinson for ensuring thousands of Arkansans have access to the quality care they need.”

Organizations supporting Step Therapy reform in Arkansas include: Arkansas Rheumatology Association, Allergy and Asthma Network, Alliance for Patient Access, American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American College of Rheumatology, Arthritis Foundation, Association of Women in Rheumatology, Coalition of State Rheumatology Organizations, Creaky Joints, Epilepsy Foundation, Global Healthy Living, Infusion Access Foundation, International Cancer Advocacy Network, International Pain Foundation, Leukemia & Lymphoma

Society, Mended Hearts, Multiple Sclerosis Association of America, National Eczema Association, National Hemophilia Foundation, National Infusion Center Association, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, National Organization for Rare Disorders, National Psoriasis Foundation, Rheumatology Nurses Society, and Susan G. Komen.

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