



August 25, 2017

Dear Colleague:

As health care providers, we know that helping our patients quit smoking is one of the most important things we can do to improve their health. However, many patients need more than just advice to quit. Advice coupled with combination pharmacotherapy, a long-acting medication (such as bupropion or nicotine patch), plus a short-acting medication (such as nicotine gum or lozenge) to address immediate cravings, provides smokers with the relief from withdrawal they need to successfully quit.<sup>1</sup>

Recent coverage changes by New York State (NYS) Medicaid Fee-for-Service (FFS) and all 18 Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), as well as medication guidance changes by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), make it easier to prescribe these safe and effective regimens for your patients:

- **NYS Medicaid removed the two-course annual limit for smoking cessation medications.** This includes all seven FDA-approved cessation medications and combinations of long- and short-acting medications.
- **NYS Medicaid removed prior authorization** for prescribing cessation medication (except for brand-name products when generics are available).
- **FDA approved removal of the warning about using two forms of nicotine containing products simultaneously**, indicating there are no significant safety concerns with prescribing combination nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or using NRT with another nicotine-containing product, such as a cigarette.
- **FDA approved the removal of the guidance to limit NRT use to 8 to 12 weeks and the boxed warning** about potential neuropsychiatric side effects for both varenicline and bupropion when used for smoking cessation.

New York has had great success reducing smoking rates over the last two decades, but we still have work to do. Smoking continues to be the number one cause of morbidity and mortality in NYS. The newly-expanded Medicaid benefit for medication and updated FDA guidance provide a great opportunity to redouble your efforts to help smokers quit. For more information, visit the [Update on the Smoking Cessation Benefit in Medicaid Fee-for-Service and Medicaid Managed Care](#) and [TalkToYourPatients.ny.gov](#).

Sincerely,

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.  
Commissioner  
NYS Department of Health

Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H.  
Commissioner  
NYC Department of Health and  
Mental Hygiene

<sup>1</sup> Fiore MC, Jaén CR, Baker TB, et al. *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update*. Clinical Practice Guideline. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Public Health Service. May 2008.