

United Concordia Dental Offers Innovative Program in Response to Study Findings

HARRISBURG, Pa. (March 23, 2012) – Medical costs are lower for people with diabetes who receive treatment for gum disease, according to a study presented today to the American Association for Dental Research by Dr. Marjorie Jeffcoat of the University of Pennsylvania. The study was done in collaboration with United Concordia Dental and Highmark Inc.

“The study showed that periodontal treatment and ongoing maintenance is associated with a significant decrease in the cost of medical care for people with diabetes – in the amount of \$1,800 per year,” said James Bramson, D.D.S., chief dental officer for United Concordia. “The findings also showed that hospitalizations decreased by 33 percent and physician visits by 13 percent across the entire study population of diabetics when gum disease is treated and managed afterward.” Findings related to pharmacy costs in the study population will be released in the near future.

More than 25.8 million adults and children are living with diabetes in 2011 – a number that has more than doubled since 1999, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“It is really a landmark study because of its size and three-year duration. These numbers clearly demonstrate the importance of the study’s findings for people with diabetes, as well as the impact the treatment of gum disease can have on the rising medical costs associated with diabetes,” said Dr. Bramson.

F.G. Merkel, United Concordia president and chief operating officer, said the dental insurer and its parent company, Highmark Inc., funded the study by Professor and Dean Emeritus Marjorie Jeffcoat, D.M.D., of the University of Pennsylvania, School of Dental Medicine, because of United Concordia’s increasing concern with the importance of oral health on overall health and to underscore both companies’ commitment to wellness.

“The study points to the ability to lower medical costs among patients with diabetes through appropriate dental care,” said Merkel. “Because of what we now know, United Concordia is introducing a group product that provides additional coverage for treatment of periodontal disease for members with diabetes. We believe that employers will realize reduced medical costs when their employees with diabetes receive appropriate periodontal care.”

As a result of the study’s findings, United Concordia will offer UCWellness, a disease-specific program that provides 100 percent coverage for maintenance following periodontal treatment, certain surgical procedures that treat gum disease and removal of plaque and tartar in patients with gum disease. An important component of UCWellness is targeted education geared toward covered members with diabetes.

“What makes UCWellness different than others on the market is the enhanced surgical benefit we are offering,” said Merkel. “United Concordia is the first to offer this type and level of coverage to people with diabetes.”

“A considerable amount of literature exists pointing to an association between dental disease and certain medical conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and premature or low birth weight infants,” said Dr. Jeffcoat. “The number of individuals’ data in this study makes it the largest of its kind and is clinically significant in my opinion.”

The information being released related to diabetes is the first in a series of findings which will demonstrate that appropriate dental treatment and maintenance can actually help lower medical costs for individuals with certain medical conditions.

“We hope these additional findings will show medically related cost savings as well. What’s clear now is that appropriate dental treatment and maintenance for diabetics can predict lower medical costs,” said Dr. Bramson.

The University of Pennsylvania study analyzed data over a three-year period from nearly 1.7 million individuals with United Concordia dental and Highmark medical coverage. It focused on determining if dental cleanings and/or treatment of gum disease would decrease the cost of medical care in patients who have diabetes. The study will also analyze other chronic diseases and conditions, such as heart disease, strokes and pregnancy with pre-term birth.

Dr. Jeffcoat presented the diabetes findings today to more than 2,500 attendees at the American Association for Dental Research annual meeting in Tampa, Florida. United Concordia expects to release the finding for the other diseases and conditions when the analysis is complete and will use the information to help employers drive down group benefit costs.

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