

HARRISBURG, Pa. (Oct. 31, 2012) – During Diabetes Awareness Month in November, United Concordia Dental, one of the nation's largest dental insurers, wants people with diabetes to know that medical costs are lower when they receive treatment for gum disease.

Earlier this year, United Concordia conducted a landmark study with parent company Highmark Inc. and the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) that showed an annual reduction in hospitalizations (33 percent), physician visits (13 percent) and overall medical costs (\$1,814) is possible when individuals with diabetes receive treatment for gum disease. The study, conducted by renowned researcher and former dean of the UPenn School of Dental Medicine Marjorie Jeffcoat, is the largest of its kind showing a connection between oral health in diabetics and medical costs.

The study analyzed data over a three-year period from nearly 1.7 million individuals with both Highmark medical coverage and United Concordia dental coverage to determine the effects of proper periodontal care. In response to the study's findings, United Concordia developed UCWellness, the first dental program to integrate an engagement and education component, as well as 100% coverage for periodontal surgery benefits that some individuals with diabetes will need to treat their disease.

"When you look at the study's sheer size and scope, as well as its statistical significance, it is clear the results are no fluke – when diabetics have their periodontal disease treated, it not only helps them become healthier, it also helps them and their employers save money in the long run," said James Bramson, D.D.S., chief dental officer.

Recently, Dr. Jeffcoat conducted another analysis of the same study subject to determine if periodontal treatment for individuals with type II diabetes who are at the highest risk for medical costs can achieve even greater reductions in those costs.

"That analysis found a significant association between cost and risk," said Dr. Bramson. "Simply put, it showed the greater the risk for patients with diabetes, the greater the savings realized."

These findings related to diabetes represent the first in a series of conclusions suggesting how appropriate dental treatment and maintenance can help predict lower medical expenses for various chronic medical conditions. Over the coming months, similar methodologies will be employed by United Concordia to examine the pharmacy benefits cost impact of treating periodontal disease in diabetics, followed by individuals treated for this disease who experienced pre-term births, heart disease and stroke.

"This study underscores a commitment to wellness by both United Concordia and Highmark, highlighting a growing concern about the importance of connecting oral health to overall health," said Dr. Bramson. "If we can mirror this study with those other diseases, we should be able to show some significant health savings there, as well, which would broaden the argument for why it makes sense to treat someone's periodontal disease across a variety of different conditions."

For further information: Beth Rutherford, United Concordia Dental, 717-260-7659, beth.rutherford@highmark.com, or Leilyn Perri, Highmark, Inc., 717-302-4243, leilyn.perri@highmark.com

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