

ASHA's State-Based Reimbursement Network

The State Advocates for Reimbursement (STARs) are ASHA-member audiologists and speech-language pathologists who are willing to advocate locally with legislators, state insurance commissioners, health plans, unions, and employers on matters related to private health plan reimbursement. They share their advocacy skills and help create coverage and reimbursement strategies with state associations. They are the link between your state and ASHA.

The STARs is a network in the true sense of the word - they are eager and willing to offer assistance, share information, and seek solutions to the reimbursement issues that challenge the financial viability of our professions. Network members must be able to count on **YOU**, their colleagues, to work with them to effect change in the private health plan system. They can't do it alone. Look below to see who is representing your state. Step up to the plate and get involved!

So what do the STARs hope to achieve? Well, their mission is to advocate for consistent coverage and equitable reimbursement rates by private payers for speech-language pathology and audiology services. The STARs also engage in bimonthly conference calls and a STARs-only e-mail listserv.

www.asha.org

Arkansas' STAR representative is Cheri Stevenson. You can reach Cheri at

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ASHA-Sponsored meeting in Little Rock, May 16, 2007

22 state representatives were present along with Jan Ozga (Director of Private Health Plans for ASHA) and Steven White, Ph.D. (Director of Health Care Economics and Advocacy for ASHA)

Two articles were provided:

1. "An Uphill Battle" from the June 2007 edition of *SmartMoney*
2. "Hear Me Out: Promoting the Value of Speech, Language and Hearing Benefits" from BenefitsNews.com (a web publication with a readership of approximately 200,000 people)

Marie Noplock (Maryland Speech and Hearing Assoc...MSHA) presented on the progressive things going on in Maryland. The MSHA Health Insurance Advocacy Committee is working to address the serious issues of third party reimbursement for pediatric Speech/language and audiology services. Their plan is divided into three areas:

Consumer Issues: Most insurance policies discriminate against kids; Developmental Delay is considered by payers as an education issue rather than a medical issue; and Employers and policyholders are unaware of the loopholes in coverage.

Provider Issues: Reimbursement rates for services are so low; Provider costs for insurance authorizations are rising.

MSHA's Healthcare agenda focuses on initiatives to:

- Require clear language in insurance policies
- Improve insurance coverage and increase reimbursement

Further information regarding Maryland's agenda is available.

The Medicare information was provided. HR 1774 and SB 45 to pass the provision that SLP's can independently bill Medicare without being a part of a health corporation.

Another portion of the language in the Medicare bill deals with moving from the Technical level to the Professional level. This would allow the SLP to be recognized for not only the time but also the work.

STAR provides grants to states. Nine states applied and received grants. The states receiving grants are: FL, ID, LA, MA, MS, OH, TN, VA, WA

The grants cover a variety of issues and types of needed assistance. This information can be provided.

This will be something that AR will want to pursue now that we are becoming more organized. This will require a committee of sorts. This will require more than one person. I like Laura's idea of the STAR, MIC and SEAL persons being a part of a committee to provide the assistance needed to the individual representative.

Stacie Rubin Smith (from Florida) presented on what FL is doing to contact business coalitions in that state.

They spend a large amount of time advocating through these large business coalitions rather than individual companies. This allows them to “cover more territory” than dealing with each individual companies.

Some issues that the companies are seeking information about are: Return to Work, Quality of Life, number of visits related to diagnosis.

Stacie’s hard copy of her PowerPoint presentation is available.

Steven White reviewed the “Current Procedural Terminology Coding Process”

CPT codes are currently under review. October 2007, there will be new CPT codes for Dysphagia. There are other codes that are also new but already in effect. These can be provided from the presentation or by looking up the CPT codes.

The CPT process is complicated. It is owned by the AMA. It is a multi-step process. Steven provided hard copies of his slides which begin to explain the process. Again, this can be provided.

Steven White also reviewed portions of book that has been provided to all STAR members by ASHA. It is entitled, *Bargaining for Advantage: Negotiation Strategies for Reasonable People*. STAR members have been reading this book. It provides good methods on negotiating, especially with company leaders.

Should AR develop a committee that begins to diligently work with insurance companies, this may be a book that others on the board or involved in the process would also want to read. It provides personal inventories to determine negotiation styles and how to negotiate knowing your style.

Katrina Zeit, OH, presented the web video that they have produced to “sell” SLP and Audiology Services. They have used parents of recipients of therapy. It is available for use by other states. OH only asks that we give them credit for making the video.

It is a good production, professionally done by one of the TV affiliates in Cleveland. OH used a STAR grant to help in paying for the production of the video.

Hopefully I will receive an email copy of this and can share in the future. It is also available to be seen on the OH speech and hearing website, www.ohioslha.org.

OH is also doing another progressive thing in their state to further awareness of S/L services. The approach is developing people's awareness of how difficult the use of AAC is. They have developed a program called "Sponsored Silence". Key people are selected and then asked to use an AAC device to communicate. One example is a principal of an elementary school. He had to communicate with his teachers and students for a 30 minute time period using only the device.

They have also had a judge to use a device for a 15 time period. This has heightened the awareness and the need for appropriate training on using AAC.

Gretchen Bebb, TX discussed how to effectively appeal claim denials.

Biggest issues are with United Healthcare.

Her biggest suggestion is to make sure that all the work is done on the front end. The questions to ask are as follows: Has the policy been reviewed? Do you need pre-authorization? Do you need to get a letter of medical necessity? Do you contact the referring physician to check of underlying diagnosis? Do you take an extensive case history? Do you get service approvals in writing?

A hard copy of her PowerPoint presentation can be provided.

During the last part of the day, the group broke into three subgroups. I placed myself on the subgroup to look at legislative issues for the STAR network. The state representatives in this group included: AR, MA, MS, VA, SD, AL, and NE.

One group looked at Employer/Union (purchaser) issues.

The other group looked at how to work with the insurance companies themselves, to get in and work to get coverage. MI has had relatively good success in working with the "blues" though there is still much ground to still get covered.

The proposals from all three groups will be typed up and then sent by email to all the members of the STAR network. This will be forwarded as soon as I receive it from ASHA.

I gratefully submit the above information as an overview of a lengthy day spent learning more about the STAR network. This is a highly beneficial group of people that I am pleased to be a part of. I do believe AR can benefit from learning what the other states are doing. There are some areas where I felt better about some things going on in AR. Some areas we are more progressive than other states.

This is a learning process for all of us. I look forward to working with more of the people in the STAR network. But most of all, I am excited about figuring out how to organize and mobilize

the ArkSHA members to become more active and better advocates for themselves in this highly competitive business of insurance and reimbursement issues.

I will forward all information as it comes to me.

I will provide further information as the board deems necessary for their review.

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