



Kansas Association
of Health Plans



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Kansas Health Plans, American Cancer Society, and Kansas Insurance Commissioner Unite to Promote Colon Cancer Screening

(TOPEKA)— March 9, 2010 – In recognition that March is Colon Cancer Awareness Month, the Kansas Association of Health Plans (KAHP), the American Cancer Society (Society), and Kansas Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger announced today at a joint news conference that they are joining forces in an effort to fight colon cancer by emphasizing to Kansans that preventive colon cancer screenings should be a priority and are a covered benefit for members of individual and group health plans.

For many years, the American Cancer Society has encouraged individuals to get regular screening for colon cancer. However, many individuals still do not get screenings when they should. In their discussions with the Society, the health plans agreed on the importance of consumer education on this issue and shared a number of initiatives they already had in place for their covered members. These initiatives include the distribution of colon cancer and screening information to insured members by newsletters, e-mails, and on the companies' websites.

“Prevention is the key to reducing the risk of colon cancer,” said Steve Robino, President of KAHP. “Our member organizations regularly inform and encourage their insured members to be screened for colon cancer according to the American Cancer Society guidelines. These guidelines provide that men and women aged 50 and over, with no symptoms and at an average risk, should receive regular preventive screening. We also encourage those insured members with a family history of colon cancer or other risk factors to consult with their healthcare provider and begin preventive screenings at an earlier age. This is a positive step in working collaboratively to reduce the incidence of colon cancer in Kansas.”

“We applaud KAHP for publicly supporting education and coverage for colon cancer screening,” said James J. Hamilton, Jr., M.D., F.A.C.S., board member of the American Cancer Society, High Plains Division, and state chair of the Commission on Cancer. “These screenings are unique because they can prevent people from getting colon cancer and avert needless deaths and suffering. Colon cancer is unique in that pre-cancerous polyps can often be detected before they develop into cancerous cells. Detecting cancer before it starts also



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saves dollars spent on treatment. Insurance coverage and education about recommended colon cancer screening options help save lives. Lack of education and insurance coverage barriers make people less likely to be screened for cancer and it puts them at a much greater risk for less successful and more expensive late-stage diagnosis of disease.”

Kansas Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger also praised the health plans’ commitment to encourage their members to get colon cancer screenings according to American Cancer Society guidelines, and to continue providing coverage for those screenings. “Colon cancer is preventable, treatable, and beatable,” Commissioner Praeger said. “It can be prevented by finding and removing polyps before they become cancerous and is highly treatable if found in its early stages. Due in part to increased awareness and improved treatment, the five-year survival rate and death rate for colon cancer among Americans has been improving since 1990. This continued commitment by the member organizations of the Kansas Association of Health Plans will keep that trend moving in the right direction for Kansans.”

The KAHP commitment was also hailed by Representative Kay Wolf (R-Prairie Village) and Representative Lisa Benlon (D-Overland Park) of the Kansas House of Representatives. “Assuring Kansans have colorectal cancer screening insurance coverage has been a top priority of mine the past three years in the legislature,” said Rep. Wolf. “I am proud to be a part of this coalition with Society, KAHP, and Insurance Commissioner Praeger. Many Kansas lives will be saved by early detection, timely screening, and the promotion of colon cancer awareness.”

“Colon cancer is a very personal issue to me,” added Rep. Benlon. “It has taken several years to remove the coverage barriers some insurers had maintained when it comes to preventive colon cancer screening, but I am proud to be a part of the compromise today. I wish to thank all parties involved. I am confident the commitment confirmed today by the KAHP member organizations will save many Kansas lives.”

The Kansas Association of Health Plans includes the following health plans: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City, Children’s Mercy Family Health Partners, Coventry Health Care of Kansas, Preferred Health Systems, Unicare, and UnitedHealthcare.

Colon cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in men and women in the United States and is the third leading cause of cancer death for men and women. Almost 1,300 new cases of colon cancer and an estimated 510 deaths from the disease are expected in Kansas during 2010.

Risk factors of colon cancer increase with age. More than 90 percent of cases are diagnosed in individuals 50 and older.



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A person with no symptoms and an average risk should begin regular screenings at age 50. Other preventative measures include maintaining a healthy weight and being physically active, eating a well-balanced diet that is high in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, limiting consumption of red meat and processed meat, limiting alcohol consumption to no more than two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women, and quitting smoking.

“About half of the deaths from colon cancer each year could be prevented in the United States if persons age 50 and older got screened according to the American Cancer Society guidelines,” said Chris Masoner, director of government relations in Kansas for the American Cancer Society, High Plains Division.

The Kansas Association of Health Plans is a nonprofit association dedicated to providing the public information on managed care health plans. Members of the KAHP are Kansas licensed health maintenance organizations, preferred provider organizations, and other entities that are associated with managed care. KAHP members serve the significant majority of Kansans enrolled in private health insurance. KAHP members also serve the Kansans enrolled in HealthWave and Medicaid managed care.

The American Cancer Society’s High Plains Division is comprised of staff and volunteers in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Texas, and Hawaii who are dedicated to saving lives and creating more birthdays by helping people stay well and get well, by finding cures, and by fighting back against cancer. For more information, visit www.cancer.org.

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