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Negotiations - Still Paying the Price

From: Brother Dan Imbagliazzo

Except for a very small number, our fellow members understand the importance of protecting our medical benefits. A few years ago I reported at a membership meeting that previous administrator Cigna was doing a terrible job of managing our medical benefits plan. Cigna was careless, lazy and was in the habit of paying exorbitant amounts to greedy providers. The union demanded PMA change administrators. We had good reason. Cigna was putting our plan at risk. We understood the dangers of their incompetence. The PMA refused to replace Cigna. The problems not only persisted, the difficulties spread like wildfire. Other providers heard about Cigna's slot machine payouts and jumped on the band wagon. They took advantage. Cigna kept paying. The destructive practices of some medical providers encouraged a very small number of our members to accept services that were less than medically necessary. Even though the number was low, the price all of us are compelled to pay is very high. In 2008 bargaining, PMA was forced to admit how bad Cigna was. They really got a shock after they agreed to quit the Cigna network of providers and began using the Blue Shield network. Our problems then blew up when the PMA – once again – didn't listen. The PMA insisted on hiring incompetent Zenith. Blue Shield was less costly but PMA gave Zenith the credit. The Coast Arbitrator agreed with the PMA TWICE. I have made my position on the Coast Arbitrator very clear. Once was too many. My opinion is he should not be re-hired. Once the light went on, the PMA didn't agree with the Union as they should have. PMA balked again and began their public campaign to call every claim "fraud". We went through what I call "Zenith Hell" trying to get our earned benefits. Everything out of network is now PMA fraud. IT IS NOT. And, our negotiators are now fighting to keep our right to seek the best medical care. Out of network is not automatic fraud. You might think we are past the problem. We are not. This set of negotiations is proof. The PMA has been stubborn to say the least. They want all kinds of give backs in the name of fraud. The consequence of Cigna's failures is being paid by every union member in this set of negotiations. It is early August and maintenance of benefits has not been decided. Time from home wears on our team and diverts attention from other important matters. The question will soon become – once the Employers get their desires satisfied and we move off of benefits, will the union have the strength to get some of the many things that we deserve? Will we persevere or not? We are still paying the price.

There is some very good news to report. Currently, I am not a caucus delegate. When I was a delegate, I was a very vocal advocate for an insurance program that will provide a death benefit to your family in the amount of \$175,000 for actives and at least \$100,000 for our pensioners. I have issued several bulletins on this matter. The insurance issue came up at the last caucus. Had there been a vote the benefit might not have survived. When I was a delegate, in order to keep the plan alive, I had to ask for two roll call votes. There are many in the Northwest that still do not want this life insurance. Here is what you must understand. First, and this is my starting point, there is no cost or risk to any member. No one has to accept the insurance. If you choose to opt out, that is your choice. There are problems that have to be settled. Here is another fact. President Bob McEllrath showed some real leadership. He told the last caucus that the plan would proceed without a vote. He had signed a letter of interest and that meant the Union would see if the details meet our needs. I cannot be more thankful. We all know of members, actives and pensioners, that have passed and their loved ones could have really benefitted from this insurance. We all owe President Bob a big thank you.

Fraternally yours,

Brother Dan Imbagliazzo