

February 26, 2013

### **Bill tries to trim medical red tape**

Behind the scenes at your doctor's office, a clerical worker is sifting through hundreds of forms to locate the precise one required by your insurance company.

Behind the benign-looking counter, there's a nightmarish world of "prior authorization" — a welter of forms and proofs required by insurance companies.

One partial solution is insanely simple: a universal form for prescription prior authorization.

Now, after two years and a failed effort in 2012, the state Legislature could enact a law requiring insurance companies to use a single form when doctors prescribe high-cost or high-dose uses of medication.

They call it a "pharmacy prior authorization form" and, in Michigan, the form comes in 150 configurations.

This is not sexy legislation. It will not bring George Clooney or any movie stars back to Michigan. It won't legalize hunting some adorable, tasty new bird variety. It's more "Lincoln" than "Argo."

But it's legislation that's trying to reduce the world's insanity, even if it's one medical form at a time.

Dr. Steven Newman, a Southfield neurologist, says the adoption of a standard, universal form will improve the quality of care at most doctor's offices, where every doctor needs two to four staff people just to cope with insurance requirements.

The form is used by insurance companies as a check against doctors who might incorrectly, or inefficiently, prescribe drugs. But the sheer volume is "a huge burden" to office staff, says Newman.

To demonstrate the absurdity of the system, state Sen. Tonya Schuitmaker, R-Kalamazoo, lugged a three-foot stack of prior authorization forms — each one slightly different from the other — to her health policy committee hearing last summer.

The stack was impressive in heft and helped pass the bill in the Senate. But it stalled in the House insurance committee.

Today, though, state Rep. Gail Haines, R-Waterford, who chairs the House health policy committee, will likely deploy the three-foot stack of forms again at a hearing on the proposed law (HB 4274 and HB 4275).

"It's amazing visually to see what some poor clerical person goes through on a daily basis," says Haines.

Neurologist Newman, who is the immediate past president of the Michigan Medical Society, will likely testify doctors and their staffs will save hours every week by adopting a universal form.

I like to imagine doctors, once liberated from the onerous burden of managing hundreds of forms, will then empathize with their long-suffering patients who have been asked to arrive 20 minutes early for our appointments to fill out forms.

Even if that's unrealistic — and I am sure it is — I want to cheer on legislators trying to free doctors to practice medicine, reduce mind-numbing paperwork and to do all this before the end of the legislative session next December.

[lberman@detroitnews.com](mailto:lberman@detroitnews.com)