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of Los Angeles County

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January 5, 2013

Mr. Peter Lee
Executive Director
California Health Benefit Exchange
560 J Street, Suite 290
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Lee

RE: COPD Quality Measures

On behalf of BREATHE California of Los Angeles County (BREATHE LA), we appreciate all of the efforts to quickly establish our State's health benefit exchange; however, we request that Covered California immediately adopt quality measures that are needed to address the health needs of people with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). As you know, the California Department of Public Health oversees a statewide population survey for the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) through funding from the Center for Disease Control. Our organization sponsored research used this data to examine COPD prevalence, diagnosis, and treatment, generating findings that raise serious questions about the quality of care provided to patients with COPD. **We believe that Covered California can provide leadership on this issue by requiring that participating insurance companies require the appropriate health quality indicators in the evaluation and management of patients with COPD.**

An estimated 1.1 million Californians have been diagnosed with COPD based on our research:
http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publications/Documents/PDF/copdpnoct2012.pdf.
National studies indicate that equal numbers of people in California have the disease but have not received diagnoses. This means that the burden of disease is twice that reported. Based on the newly analyzed BRFSS data, findings indicate that significant numbers of people with COPD have never smoked, are under the age of 45, and are women, providing a striking contrast to the perception that the disease is solely a "smokers" condition affecting men and older people. Perhaps most alarming is that the analyses show that approximately one-third of those diagnosed with COPD have never received a spirometry test, even though this is the only approved method for diagnosing the disease.

The economic and quality of life related burden caused by COPD are severe, with costs exceeding $49.9 billion in the nation for 2010. In spite of the

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severe impact of COPD there are proven methods to reduce costs and improve health status that translate decreased exacerbations, emergency room visits, hospitalizations and readmissions. Through proper diagnosis, pharmacotherapy, oxygen therapy, and strategies like pulmonary rehabilitation, a comprehensive disease management and education program can improve the lives of people with COPD.

Incorporating COPD quality measures holds great potential in improving COPD outcomes. Appropriate diagnosis and treatment of COPD patients remain an ongoing issue, despite clear evidence supporting the need for confirmatory spirometry, widely available reimbursement for spirometry and endorsement by every available practice guideline.

Spirometry is essential for early diagnosis and helps the physician provide a more tailored care plan. Additionally, the use of appropriate medication before, during and after an exacerbation is critical in efforts to shorten hospital stays, prevent costly readmissions, and improve the health of California residents living with COPD.

To spearhead the effort against this disease, there are two well accepted quality measures that are currently used to define of baseline quality COPD care. **HEDIS quality measures on the use of spirometry and exacerbation related medications have been included in their guidelines since 2006 and 2008 respectively.**

In addition to our findings of a statewide gap in the utilization of of spirometry, the National Committee for Quality Assurance also report that only 41.3 percent of individuals with a new COPD diagnosis in commercial HMO plans and a mere 31.3% in Medicaid HMO plans received a spirometry test to confirm their diagnosis. The results for bronchodilator and system corticosteroid use in individuals with an ED visit or hospitalization with a COPD discharge are higher, yet continued improvement is needed to reduce the frequency of exacerbations and the progression of the disease.

BREATHE LA's focus on COPD is driven by its Board of Directors, which includes researchers and medical professionals and The Trudeau Society of Los Angeles, which is comprised of pulmonary physicians and associated health care professionals, all working in partnership against this disease. BREATHE LA targets outreach and education efforts through our Better Breathers Clubs™ program in neighborhoods of Los Angeles County. This efforts provides education, services, and support groups primarily to people living with COPD to improve health outcomes and quality of life. Through a partnership with the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, BREATHE LA

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established a COPD Regional Center in the western U.S. to raise COPD awareness and share best practices among health service providers.

Covered California has great leverage to create quality care through the collection of required quality measures and our organization believes that this leverage should be utilized in a way that encourages a comprehensive and complete diagnosis and treatment regimen for all COPD patients. COPD is a growing public health crisis and the only cause of death that has increased in the past decade. The window for making an impact on this disease is NOW, and this can be done by implementing policies that will reverse the trend of increasing mortality and declining health outcomes for the millions of California residents with COPD.

This is a tremendous undertaking that will require the coordinated efforts of every healthcare agency, healthcare organization and innumerable healthcare providers in Los Angeles County, California and the nation. **We all need to partner to achieve our mutual goals and would like to meet with you to discuss opportunities and a partnership to address this 21st century crisis. Please let us know your availability for a conference to discuss this and related respiratory health issues**.

Thank you for your attention and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Guy Soo Hoo M.D. MPH
Chair of the Program and Research Committee
BREATHE LA

Eugene A. Port, C.I.H.
Chair of the Advocacy Committee
BREATHE LA

cc:
Enrique Chiock, President and CEO, BREATHE LA
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