



New Bariatric Pre-Surgery Education Program Begins February 15, 2010

Effective February 15, 2010, COVA Care and COVA Connect members who are contemplating bariatric or lap band surgery for morbid obesity must participate in a pre-surgery education program. **Surgical procedures for morbid obesity will not be approved by the plan until the member completes the program.**

The program was developed in response to a 2009 General Assembly request for a progressive weight management education program as an alternative to proposed elimination of coverage for bariatric surgery. It will address concerns about possible health risks for some surgery candidates, make members more aware of alternatives to surgery and help improve the health outcomes for those who have it. The program includes:

- Initial meeting with a bariatric surgeon
- Pre-surgery medical policy guidelines on who qualifies for surgery
- 12-month participation in the Commonwealth's bariatric education program before surgery
- Participation in a weight management program such as Weight Watchers or Jenny Craig
- Behavioral health assessment and ongoing counseling as needed during the period
- Participation in the plan's disease management program to address obesity and other conditions associated with obesity, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and orthopedic issues
- Coaching with a weight or health coach, case manager or nurse advocate to provide support and track progress
- A final assessment by a behavioral health professional and physician other than a bariatric surgeon to determine if the member still needs the surgery
- Follow-up after the surgery
- Continued involvement and support for up to 24 months, or longer if needed, with the coach, nurse advocate or case manager and behavioral health professional to develop nutrition and exercise plans and track outcomes as directed by the physician

The COVA Care and COVA Connect member handbooks will be updated online at <http://www.dhrm.state.va.us> to include more details on the program.