

# AMERICAN COLLEGE OF GASTROENTEROLOGY STATEMENT



## UHC Finally Listens to ACG & GI Community on Prior Authorization, But Questions Remain

**June 1, 2023** – After ACG and the GI societies pushed back against insurance giant UnitedHealthcare (UHC), the company announced last night it will scrap its planned prior authorization restrictions on endoscopy scheduled to start today. Since UHC announced this ill-conceived plan in March, curbing this abusive practice has been a top ACG priority.

In the eleventh hour, UHC announced a change of direction and will now implement what it characterizes as an “advance notification program” for GI services effective immediately.

Just yesterday, ACG President Daniel Pambianco, MD, FACG, joined patient advocates at a rally organized by the Crohn’s and Colitis Foundation at United headquarters in Minnesota, urging UHC to abandon these new prior authorization rules. “I left yesterday’s patient rally energized and fueled with more passion after speaking and hearing from our patient advocates...We will need this energy too, as this new program only adds to the uncertainty. As you can imagine, this program and announcement raises more questions than answers, and in my opinion, may interfere with the ability to treat patients and practice medicine,” said Dr. Pambianco. “For example, I may have to go through a ‘comprehensive peer-to-peer discussion’ with a UHC representative to educate me on adhering to guidelines as to over- or under-utilization if I choose to not participate. Are they actually going to recommend that I may not be doing enough endoscopies? That’s absurd!” added Dr. Pambianco.

### Full Implications for GI Practices and Patients Remain Unclear

As this new program triggers a whole set of operational challenges, it remains to be seen whether this change is ultimately less burdensome than UHC’s original plans to impose prior authorization restrictions on endoscopy. GI providers will be encouraged to notify UHC prior to performing a procedure and provide certain data United will use to accelerate its Gold Card program in 2024. For the time being, UHC will still pay claims without advance notification or if UHC deems insufficient information was submitted through the provider’s portal.

UHC encourages providers to submit data ahead of time to the company to help roll out its Gold Card Program in 2024. While voluntary, a gastroenterologist will be ineligible for the Gold Card Program without first participating in this advance notification program.

“We urge caution in buying into any advance notification program while it’s voluntary and for the purposes of gathering information,” commented Chair of the ACG Board of Governors, Dayna Early, MD, FACG. “Things are still unclear. Our members should think carefully about whether the effort and resources required in participating in this advance notification program, or any future Gold Card program, would benefit patients and GI practice operations in the long-term.”

As UHC implements its Gold Card program in 2024, ACG hopes there can be meaningful opportunities to collaborate and that UHC will share its data on endoscopic utilization and work with the GI community to protect the patient-provider relationship and alleviate administrative burdens borne by GI practices.

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ACG will continue to fight on behalf of GI patients to ensure timely access to quality GI endoscopic procedures and to represent the interests of GI practices and GI physicians, protecting against any coverage policies that potentially interfere with the patient-provider relationship.

## **Resources**

June 1, 2023 UHC Statement on Advance Notification Program

<https://www.uhcprovider.com/en/prior-auth-advance-notification/gastroenterology-prior-auth.html>

UHC FAQ on Gastroenterology Endoscopy Advance Notification

<https://www.uhcprovider.com/content/dam/provider/docs/public/prior-auth/Prior-Auth-Gastroenterology-FAQ.pdf>

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