February 20, 2014

RE: Prescribing Antipsychotic Medication to Children under Illinois State Guardianship

Dear Illinois Providers,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you about a new requirement to screen for the Metabolic Syndrome with all children under state guardianship (IDCFS) for whom you have prescribed an atypical antipsychotic medication. The following form should be completed at the intervals indicated to determine if pediatric patients screen positive for the Metabolic Syndrome, a weight related side effect commonly associated with atypical antipsychotic medications. Starting May 1, 2014, consent for atypical antipsychotic medications through the DCFS psychotropic consent line will be dependent upon completion of this form. In the meantime, please collect the needed information and order the necessary labs to comply with the new requirement and prevent any future consent related delays.

This new requirement is one of several resulting from Illinois’ participation in a three-year quality assurance initiative to improve psychotropic medication prescribing for and management of children and youth in foster care. The initiative is sponsored by The Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc. (CHCS), with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF). Illinois’ state team is a partnership between Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), the state Medicaid agency; Department of Human Services - Division of Mental Health (DHS-DMH), the state mental health agency; the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the state child welfare agency and the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Clinical Services in Psychopharmacology Program. One of the Illinois project goals is to improve screening rates for metabolic disturbances among children under state guardianship prescribed atypical antipsychotics.

Background
In part due to the high rates of trauma experienced by children involved in DCFS, foster children have higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems, use mental health services at higher rates and are prescribed psychotropic medications more frequently than children their age when matched for Medicaid status. In recent years the use of psychotropic medications among children and adolescents in the child welfare system has come under intense scrutiny. Concerns have been raised about the percentage of foster children on psychotropic medications, the number and dosages of medications prescribed, and the ages of the children receiving these medications. Specific concerns have been raised about the increasing use of antipsychotic medications in this vulnerable population and the high rate of weight gain, metabolic disturbances and diabetes in
children being prescribed these medications. DCFS has monitored the use of psychotropic medications in children for whom they are responsible. Recent data shows that the rate of atypical antipsychotic medication use among children under state guardianship in Illinois is approximately 13%. The state of Illinois has undertaken this project to decrease the likelihood of foster children developing the metabolic syndrome and diabetes.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Debra Dyer-Webster, Esq.
Guardianship Administrator