Dear Chairman, CEO & President Conlin:

Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey published an update on April 25, 2019, to their Ultrasound Services Program. This change requires patient preauthorization for outpatient diagnostic ultrasounds effective Wednesday, May 1, 2019. The Vascular Society of New Jersey rejects the short timeline and the raises significant concerns for patient care that this policy will produce.

The short notice—less than one week—does not allow for the approval process for patients already scheduled in early May. Many patients are scheduled up to a year in advance for surveillance studies. The 6 days’ notice simply does not provide adequate time to reschedule these patients so that they can obtain appropriate studies at the time of their office visit.

More importantly, this policy will have a deleterious effect on patient care going forward. Patients are frequently referred to a Vascular Surgeon’s office for an acute problem (for example, concern for a blood clot in the leg.). Your policy allows for a determination of medical necessity to be denied after the emergent study has been performed. This will promote a delay in the study being performed awaiting an approval process—clearly a consequence not in the best interest of the patient with the acute problem. If the provider undertakes the test—in the best interest of the patient—that provider is at financial risk.

The Vascular Society of New Jersey supports appropriate oversight and the need to reduce unnecessary and duplicate studies. However, independent accrediting bodies, for example, ICAVL (Intersocietal Accreditation Commission Vascular Lab), works to approve laboratories that follow appropriate guidelines and produce quality results. This should provide the oversight necessary to assure appropriate use of the vascular diagnostic studies.

We request—on the basis of patient safety and quality-- that BCBS of NJ delay the implementation of this policy. Additionally, we suggest the implementation of a policy that recognizes nationally accepted standards and accrediting bodies to insure quality and access to our mutual patients. The Vascular Society of New Jersey will gladly join with you in an effort to promote quality patient care that is accessible and appropriately utilized.

Sincerely,
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CC: Commissioner Shereef Elnahal, M.D., M.B.A. – New Jersey Department of Health
Commissioner Marlene Caride, J.D. – New Jersey Department of Banking & Insurance
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