

Anthem, DSS at odds over 'misunderstanding' of fee reduction

Anthem, an insurer in the state "Husky" health program, has tried to reduce fees for dentists in the plan, which may have been prompted by a misunderstanding.

By Russell Vermilyea

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State Department of Social Services Commissioner Michael P. Starkowski in September placed a hold on such reductions after Anthem sought to reduce fees then.

It looks like there was a "misunderstanding between Anthem and DSS on the moratorium on fee reductions," DSS spokesman Matthew Barrett said today. "The commissioner did not approve the reduction."

He said the misunderstanding may have originated in September, when the issue arose. Anthem, he said, may have thought the fee-reduction hold would last only a few months, but Starkowski first wants resolution of reimbursement rates for dentists in the plan across the board.

Barrett said the new, lower dental payments would not have gone into effect until Nov. 25, no fees have been cut, and plan services remain as is. He also said the fee-reduction issue involves only Anthem, not the other three insurers on the Husky plan.

Husky is for disadvantaged children and their families, which is financed by the state and the federal Medicaid program for the poor and disabled.

Bolton dentist **Ginger Pollack**, who filed the original complaint about the fee reduction in September, also alerted DSS to the latest fee reduction.

It was Pollack's complaint that led the state to place a moratorium on lower fee payments.

Pollack's chief financial officer, Daniel Kaufman, said today that Pollack and others on the plan received a packet on the new fees, saying they would go into effect next month.

He said the reductions weren't a matter of negotiation and were below the cost of doing business.

"In other words, the dentists operate at a loss while they make money," he said.

Kaufman said he and Starkowski will contact Anthem and Healthplex today over the issue.

The Anthem Husky insurance program is administered by subcontractor Healthplex of Uniondale, N.Y. Healthplex President Martin Kane, a dentist, said in an e-mail Monday that Anthem told Healthplex to "renegotiate" fees with dentists on the Husky plan.

"We really haven't had a bad response. There were only a couple of dentists who objected," Kane said.