

Fairview may no longer accept Blue Cross

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By Dawn Slade

Mille Lacs County Times

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It's a relationship that has been in place since the late 1940s.

If an agreement is not reached before the Aug. 23 contract expiration, members of Blue Cross may be considered out-of-network if they continue with their Fairview health care provider.

This includes the Fairview Lakes Medical Center in Wyoming and clinics in Rush City and North Branch.

Upwards of 50,000 Blue Cross members who have used Fairview clinics in the last 12 months received notification by mail in July of the network change.

Blue Cross claims that in contract negotiations, Fairview has requested financial terms that are outside the norm of those requested by similar care systems.

In its letter, Blue Cross states it cannot justify passing on higher costs to their customers.

Fairview said it's seeking the same prices paid by HealthPartners, Medica and Preferred One.

Fairview recently reached an agreement with Medica.

Blue Cross is the state's largest health insurer.

Fairview is the third largest clinic and hospital group in the state. It owns the University of Minnesota Medical Center.

Fairview administration is hopeful an agreement will be reached before the expiration of the contract.

Ryan Davenport, Fairview Health Services Media Relations Manager, said, "We've never not reached an agreement with a commercial payer before the contract expiration.

"It's our expectation that we will, we're just not there yet."

Davenport said Fairview had only had a couple instances in the last 10 years that they had fallen in the 30-day window of a contract expiration without an agreement in place.

"It doesn't happen very often," he added. "We've never gone out-of-network with a commercial payer."

Pam Lux, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Director of Public Relations, said. "Fairview sent a termination notice to Blue Cross that they did not intend to renew that contract.

"I think it's pretty unusual that a clinic or hospital sends a notice like that."

Davenport agreed that Blue Cross was served notice by Fairview, however he said it was sent in order to negotiate the

new contract.

“That’s not an unusual part of the process,” Davenport said.

Two years ago Fairview and Blue Cross reached an agreement, Aug. 23 is the end of that two-year contract.

Fairview’s request for reimbursement was not what Blue Cross was willing to agree to, Lux said.

She then added that Blue Cross administration said, “Let’s look at what it would take to renew the contract.”

“We’re hoping to get it resolved,” Lux added. “On the other hand we don’t want members to be surprised. We erred on the side of equipping the members to make their own best decision.”

“When you reach the point that a contract is not reached within 30 days of expiration, Blue Cross is required to notify its members,” Davenport stated.

“I think both of us would like Fairview to be in the network,” Lux said. “As of today, we don’t have any negotiation talks scheduled.”

“Based on contracts with similar providers, there’s a big enough gap that we’re unable to renew it. I can’t predict how that will change in the future.”

Davenport added, “We recognize this can be stressful for patients. Their health care needs is the main focus. That’s what our priority is.”

“We haven’t given up hope.”

Blue Cross recommends customers who have questions call the customer service number on the back of their membership card or go to the Web site: bluecrossmn.com.

Members can check the status of the contract at <http://www.fairview.org/bcbs/index.asp>. You also can call Fairview at (612) 672-7272.