

On Friday, November 20, Nene Ruelo, Rohoni Shaikh, and Grace Haidenthaller along with Union Representatives Maryanne Salm and Judith Serlin met with Prime's VP Operations, Allen Stefanek, to discuss the changes to the medical, dental and vision benefits.

Contract language in Article 15 states that the hospital cannot increase premiums or decrease benefits. Yet Prime has proposed increasing the cost of the vision premium from about \$1.50 to \$3.50 a month (depending upon the plan) but improving the MetLife PPO dental plan by increasing the total annual dental benefit from \$1,200 to \$1,600 and for the Life Preventative Dental Plan from \$200 to \$500.

When we questioned Stefanek, he stated that if the Union wanted, he would change it back. Although it may seem obvious, this is a choice.

***Which benefit do
you use more:
dental or vision?***

***Let Nene, Grace or Rohoni know
your preference.***

When Representatives from our Union met with Allen Stefanek to discuss benefit changes, he stated that Prime is shifting from a fully insured health benefit program to a self-insured program. Under a fully insured program, the insurance carrier either earns a profit or suffers a loss depending upon utilization rates. Under a self-insured plan, Prime would take a risk and either reap the profits or suffer the losses. Stefanek said that there were many reasons Prime chose to self-insure, including pending health insurance reform and an increase in premium costs.

During this same time period, Prime made changes to its benefit plans. The company is now offering a Prime healthcare PPO and EPO (Exclusive Provider Organization), which combines aspects from the HMO and PPO plan and provides access to Prime Healthcare hospitals and physicians with lower out-of-pocket costs.

These new plans are supposed to "mirror" current benefits. However, there is an increase in the calendar year out-of-pocket maximum for the dental plan that is "balanced" by an increase in payroll contributions for vision benefits. ***See column at left and let a steward know which benefit coverage you prefer.***

Co-pays are also higher under the new plan for durable medical equipment and home healthcare. When our Union pointed out these inconsistencies, Stefanek quickly agreed to adjust the plan.

Stefanek stated that the hospital is continuing to add doctors to their network and that they will look into doctors who specialize in "women's and children's healthcare." He also pointed out the flexibility available in the new EPO program, in which employees could go to a Prime facility or could use the Blue Cross list and see their own doctor.

Our Union has requested additional documentation and will continue to analyze the benefits. If you have questions, talk with a steward or call or email Judith Serlin at 213 247-4584 or serlinj@seiu121rn.org