



Assistant Secretary for Health
Office of Public Health and Science
Washington D.C. 20201

DEC 11 2003

TO: All Active and Retired Commissioned Corps Officers and Eligible Beneficiaries

FROM: Acting Assistant Secretary for Health

SUBJECT: TRICARE and Commissioned Corps Officers

The purpose of this communication is to let you know about upcoming changes to the process through which healthcare services are made available to active and retired Commissioned Corps Officers and their dependents.

In the past, many of you opted to join TRICARE (previously CHAMPUS) for your health care services. Others, who were in remote locations or had received exceptions, used the alternative Beneficiary Medical Program administered by the Medical Affairs Branch (MAB) of the Public Health Service.

In recent years, TRICARE has expanded both its services and geographic areas of coverage, including a TRICARE Prime Remote program. TRICARE Prime Remote provides health care coverage through civilian networks or TRICARE-authorized providers for Uniformed Service members and their families. TRICARE and TRICARE Prime Remote provide high levels of service and satisfaction to its participants. In a recent survey by an independent healthcare research company, TRICARE was ranked number one among health insurers nationally.

Given the expansion of availability and the extensive nature of the TRICARE system, we have concluded that TRICARE can deliver the best health care for the Corps and its beneficiaries. Consequently, there is no need to continue a separate Beneficiary Medical Program. This means that beginning in January 2004, medical benefits will be authorized for all Commissioned Corps beneficiaries through TRICARE.

Since its inception, TRICARE has undergone dramatic changes and offers many advantages due to its size and scope. It offers a number of attractive features:

- Highly skilled medical professionals dedicated to keeping you and your dependents healthy.

- The Pharmacy Data Transaction Service which offers drug interaction assessments when new drugs are prescribed and has helped avert thousands of life threatening interactions.
- TRICARE online - a web portal that can be personalized and enables the member to check on the status of claims, make appointments, enroll, and access other services.
- A large variety of special programs designed to help you manage all aspects of your health.
- Three options for health care for a choice that fits your needs: TRICARE Prime, the enrollment option with a network of providers offering the least costly option; TRICARE Extra, a network of providers with some discounts; and TRICARE Standard, the former CHAMPUS program on a fee-for-service basis.
- When you are on a remote assignment, typically 50 miles from a military treatment facility, you are eligible for TRICARE Prime Remote (TPR). TPR provides health care through a civilian network or TRICARE-authorized providers for you and your dependents. TRICARE Prime Remote for Active Duty Family Members (TPRADFM) is the TPR benefit for family members with similar benefits and program requirements.

As you transfer to the TRICARE system, you will have support and assistance from the TRICARE staff as well as the Medical Affairs Branch. The staff of the Medical Affairs Branch will operate a Help Desk function to make the transition smooth and to facilitate on-going communications. The first step in making the switch is completing your enrollment into TRICARE as soon as possible. For those of you not enrolled in TRICARE already, we understand you may need further information to make your decision easier concerning which TRICARE option is best for you and your dependent beneficiaries. Attached is a brochure that will give you more details about TRICARE.

We are also in the process of creating a web site to help you with the enrollment and assistance process. In the meantime, you may want to access TRICARE's web site, www.tricare.osd.mil, to get additional information. On its home page, you will find a specific icon on the left-hand side entitled "For TRICARE Beneficiaries" with many fact sheets on various aspects of the program and a map of the United States with a list of telephone numbers which you can call for further information. Be sure to identify yourself as a Public Health Service officer. In addition, and in the event that the TRICARE points of contact are unable to handle your unique situation, the Medical Affairs Branch in the Program Support Center (which can be reached at 800-368-2777) will continue to assist you during this transition.

We are pleased about other developments as well. We have completed negotiations with Emory HealthCare for service to the Greater Atlanta area. Emory HealthCare is now a TRICARE provider, and officers in the greater Atlanta area, along with other uniformed services members, can utilize the services provided by Emory HealthCare. We are also

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working to enhance your dental entitlement to include access to a national network of providers for your dental care.

We are committed to doing everything we can to make this transition successful. Please rest assured that only the administration of your entitlement will change. The entitlement itself will not be changed. I want to make sure you have the best information possible to make the optimal choices for your healthcare.

Cristina V. Beato M.D.
Cristina V. Beato, M.D.

Attachment