

Playing it Smart with Year-End Healthcare

By: Kyle Swift, CEO, Woodland Heights Medical Center

The end of the year is fast approaching. When New Year's Day 2017, rolls around in a few short weeks, the slate will be wiped clean and everyone will gain a fresh start to another new year.

The slate that's wiped clean also will include the tally of healthcare expenses you've incurred through 2016 which count toward your deductible.

Now is the time to play it smart and check to see if you've met your deductible. Health plans typically begin paying for the majority—if not all—of your healthcare expenses once you've met that threshold. So if you have met your deductible or are close to reaching it, this is the ideal time to maximize your plan benefits and schedule appropriate appointments, testing and procedures. You may save hundreds or even thousands of dollars, depending on what healthcare you need, if it's obtained before the end of the year.

Additionally, individuals who have a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) need to check their balance. The Internal Revenue Service requires these accounts, which hold pre-tax dollars set aside to pay for healthcare-related expenses, be depleted by the end of the year or the money is forfeited. This adds another incentive to schedule services now: ensure those hard-earned dollars are spent, not lost.

Health insurance plans reward individuals who plan and manage their health care. Taking 15 minutes to set-up appointments, now, could save you a significant amount of money. The key is to obtain all the health services you need before December 31, because with the New Year comes a new deductible, and any balance in an FSA account is lost.

Another important reminder as flu season hits full stride is to get your flu shot. The best way to protect yourself and others from getting or spreading the flu is by getting the flu vaccine. The flu is one of the most infectious diseases in the world. Five to 20 percent of Americans are affected by the virus each year and more than 200,000 are hospitalized. According to the CDC, the range of flu-associated deaths in a year ranges from 3,000 to 49,000. It is recommended by the CDC that everyone 6 months and older receive the flu vaccine.

In addition to the flu vaccine, these good health habits can help prevent the flu: avoid close contact with people who have the flu or symptoms, stay home when you are sick, cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze, wash your hands frequently, and resist touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

In 2017, I encourage you to make your health (and your loved ones' health) a priority. I wish you a happy and healthy holiday season.

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About Woodland Heights Medical Center

Established in 1918, Woodland Heights Medical Center was Lufkin's first hospital. Now, more than nine decades later, Woodland Heights is recognized throughout Deep East Texas as the leading provider of high quality, innovative health care services. Accommodating a wide range of clinical specialties, Woodland Heights has achieved excellence in key medical and surgical areas including cardiology, pulmonology, neurology, orthopedic surgery, physical medicine/rehabilitation, vascular surgery and obstetrics and gynecology. Woodland Heights also offers a full range of outpatient diagnostic services including advanced imaging, laboratory, outpatient surgery and emergency services. Through its Rehabilitation Center, Woodland Heights offers cardiac rehabilitation, stroke recovery and physical and occupational rehabilitation. The facility also houses the only Level 2 Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in the deep East Texas area. Woodland Heights is directly or indirectly owned by a partnership that proudly includes physician owners, including certain members of the hospital's medical staff. Combining modern facilities, leading technology, an exceptional staff and a commitment to the communities it serves, Woodland Heights Medical Center remains at the forefront of quality health care in Deep East Texas.