

UnitedHealthcare to Implement Prior Authorization for Certain Colonoscopies

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Individuals who are covered under UnitedHealthcare's commercial insurance will now require prior authorization for a colonoscopy. This policy, which goes live on June 1, 2023, does not apply to [screening colonoscopy](#), which is conducted in individuals (45-74 years) at average risk who are healthy and do not display any gastrointestinal symptoms.

To understand the prior authorization process, [read more here](#).

Procedures that will require prior authorization include:

- Diagnostic colonoscopies: conducted in those who have a greater risk of colorectal cancer. This would include individuals with abnormal gastrointestinal symptoms, polyps in the colon, or a positive screening test.
- Surveillance colonoscopies: conducted in those who have a personal history of colorectal polyps or cancer.

Will This Create Access Barriers for Patients?

Physicians are concerned that this procedural change will impact both patients and healthcare staff. Prior authorization adds a layer of administrative burden for clinics and hospitals. More importantly, gastroenterologists and oncologists are concerned that patients may face unnecessary delays in diagnostic procedures, which can potentially affect disease outcome.

Folasade May, M.D., Ph.D., M.Phil., [expressed her concerns](#) with long wait times—maybe even weeks or months—for the approval to come through. For patients with aggressive disease, being left undiagnosed while waiting for insurance approval could mean advanced stage cancer, which is usually difficult to treat.

Colonoscopy procedures can be expensive if paid for out of pocket. The [procedure alone can cost](#) on average \$2,125; this can increase to an average of \$2,543 with the added costs of anesthesia, pathology, and bowel preparation.

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