For the past two years the 14-member edHealth coalition, including Boston College, has participated in the Preferred University Rx Purchasing Coalition (PURPC), a group of now 40 institutions that have collaborated to obtain better pricing on prescription drugs. Several years ago PURPC contracted with OptumRx, and all the edHealth schools have used Optum since January 2017.

The edHealth schools have traditionally used an “open formulary” for their prescription drug benefit, which means that virtually every drug is covered, although sometimes with restrictions, such as, higher copayments, prior authorization requirements, quantity limits, or step therapy rules. A more cost-efficient approach is to use a so-called “closed formulary,” which means that certain drugs, often higher-priced, are not covered. In all cases, non-covered drugs have clinically approved, lower-cost alternatives, either generic or other brand name drugs.

By January 2019 the majority of edHealth schools, including Boston College, will have transitioned to OptumRx’s closed formulary, which all of the other PURPC institutions already utilize. This means that certain prescriptions for some B.C. employees and dependents will no longer be covered as of January 1. In early November, we expect OptumRx to notify anyone who will be affected by this change (estimated to be about 100 members), in order to provide time for an alternative prescription to be issued by the patient’s physician. (The Optum letters will include at least one recommended alternative.) If a physician feels strongly that the excluded drug is still the preferred remedy, an appeal can be filed with OptumRx, although there is no guarantee that the appeal will be granted.

We recognize that some people are going to be inconvenienced by this change, but the overall cost savings are significant and this change is one of the reasons why we are able to announce a zero premium increase for the second year in a row.

This is a reminder of a policy put in place last year. Given the serious problems stemming from opioid use in Massachusetts, Harvard Pilgrim covers methadone maintenance in full, with no copay, when the service is received from in-network providers. The intent is to remove a barrier that might preclude someone from seeking treatment. The edHealth schools adopted this zero copay policy last January. Note that it may be helpful for members to bring it to the attention of personnel in a doctor’s office if the visit is opioid-related, in order to avoid the copayment.
This is a reminder that Harvard Pilgrim has a telemedicine service through Doctor on Demand, a national telemedicine provider group of board-certified physicians, as well as, licensed psychologists and psychiatrists. This service allows members to see a provider through real-time, Skype-like technology using a smartphone, tablet, or computer. You can receive care for numerous non-acute conditions without going to a provider’s office, an urgent care center, or an emergency room. Doctor on Demand is available from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. No referral is necessary.

Some common medical conditions that can often be treated include: coughs and colds, sore/strep throat, flu, sinus and allergies, rashes and skin issues, eye issues, etc.

Behavioral health matters that are commonly treated include: depression, relationship issues, workplace stress, social anxiety, trauma and loss.

Note that Doctor on Demand is not to be used for crisis or emergency situations. In such cases, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

You download the free app from the App Store or Google Play to your mobile device by going to www.doctorondemand.com. You can also visit that site for general information about the service. The cost is your normal $25 office copayment using a credit or debit card. Doctor on Demand is not intended to replace routine care with a primary care provider.