



STATE OF FLORIDA
AGENCY FOR HEALTH CARE ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF FAIR HEARINGS

FILED

Jan 25, 2024, 10:15 am

OFFICE OF FAIR HEARINGS

AHCA Case No.: 23-FH2651

[REDACTED]

PETITIONER,

vs.

AGENCY FOR HEALTH CARE
ADMINISTRATION,

RESPONDENT.

FINAL ORDER

Pursuant to notice, the undersigned Hearing Officer convened a telephonic Fair Hearing on the instant case on December 11, 2023, at 9:32 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (“EST”).

APPEARANCES

For the Petitioner:

[REDACTED]

Petitioner’s Authorized Representative

For the Respondent:

Sandra Durden
Medical Health Care Program Analyst
Agency for Health Care Administration

STATEMENT OF ISSUE

The issue is whether Respondent proved by a preponderance of the evidence that Respondent’s termination of Petitioner’s behavior analysis (“ABA” or “BA”) services was correct.

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

All parties and witnesses appeared telephonically. [REDACTED] (“[REDACTED]”), Petitioner’s Authorized Representative, appeared on behalf of Petitioner.

Sandra Durden, Registered Nurse Specialist and Fair Hearing Liaison for the Agency for Health Care Administration (“Agency” or “AHCA”), appeared for the Fair Hearing as a representative for Respondent. Dr. David Bicard (“Dr. Bicard”), Board-Certified Behavior Analyst at the Doctoral Level (“BCBA-D”) and Second Level Reviewer for eQHealth Solutions, appeared for the Fair Hearing as a witness for Respondent.

The following Spanish translators appeared at the Fair Hearing to provide translation services: Andres, ID Number 419815.

Petitioner did not introduce any exhibits at the Fair Hearing.

Prior to the Fair Hearing, Respondent sent to the Office of Fair Hearings and Petitioner a two hundred and seventy-one (271)-page evidence packet and a forty-nine (49)-page evidence packet. The two hundred and seventy-one (271)-page packet appears in the Office of Fair Hearings’ document management system as the files titled “[REDACTED] FH 12.11.2023 1 – 210.pdf” and “[REDACTED] FH 12.11.2023 211 – 271.pdf”. The forty-nine (49)-page packet appears in the Office of Fair Hearings’ document management system as the file titled “23-FH 2651 AHCA EVIDENCE PKT – BA.pdf”. Absent an objection from Petitioner, the undersigned admitted the two hundred and seventy-one (271)-page evidence packet as Respondent’s Composite Exhibit 1 (“RCE 1”) and the forty-nine (49)-page evidence packet as Respondent’s Composite Exhibit 2 (“RCE 2”).

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Petitioner receives Medicaid services on a fee-for-service basis through the Agency. See RCE 1 at 21. eQHealth is a Quality Improvement Organization contracted by the Agency to review prior authorization requests for services. See RCE 2 at 2.

2. Petitioner is [REDACTED]. See RCE 1 at 21. Petitioner is diagnosed with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] *Id.* at 21.

3. Petitioner's provider, [REDACTED], provided the Behavior Analysis Reassessment ("Reassessment"), dated August 2, 2023, and updated on October 10, 2023. *Id.* at 209. According to the Reassessment, Petitioner is engaging in the following maladaptive behaviors: [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. *Id.* at 210 – 212. The data graphs for maladaptive behaviors in the Reassessment show the following between March 4, 2023, and July 29, 2023: for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED] and are relatively stable; for [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased [REDACTED] for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED]; for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED]; for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED]; for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED]; for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED]; for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED]; for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED]; and for [REDACTED] [REDACTED], Petitioner's incidents decreased from approximately [REDACTED]. *Id.* at 233 – 238.

4. As provided in the Reassessment, the data graphs for replacement behaviors show the following: an increase in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] of opportunities; an increase in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] of opportunities; an increase of [REDACTED] [REDACTED]; an increase in [REDACTED]; an increase in [REDACTED] an increase in [REDACTED] [REDACTED]; an increase in [REDACTED] [REDACTED]; an increase in [REDACTED] an increase in [REDACTED] an increase in [REDACTED]; an increase in [REDACTED] and an increase in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] *Id.* at 245 – 251.

5. On September 6, 2023, Petitioner requested continuation of BA services; specifically, 312 units of code 97155; 104 units of code 97156; and 2,600 units of code 97153. *See* RCE 1 at 29. In a Notice of Outcome (“NOO”), dated September 7, 2023, Respondent terminated Petitioner’s BA services. *Id.* at 29 – 33. The NOO states as follows:

Code: 97155 Intervention without protocol modification, per 15 minutes
From: 8/29/23
Thru: 2/22/24
Total Units: Denied 312

Code: 97156 Family training, per 15 minutes, Lead Analyst
From: 8/29/23
Thru: 2/22/24
Total Units: Denied 104

Code: 97153 Intervention without protocol modification, per 15 minutes, Lead Analyst, BCaBA, or RBT

From: 8/29/23
Thru: 2/22/24
Total Units: Denied 2,600

The NOO explained the basis for the termination as follows:

The request for services is denied in whole or in part because they are not medically necessary as defined in Rule 59G-1.010, Florida Administrative Code. Specially, the requested services are not medically necessary under the following standard(s):

Consistent with generally accepted professional medical standards as determined by the Medicaid program, and not experimental or investigational.

The NOO further provided:

The rationale for our decision is as follows:

PR Principal Reason – Denial:

Requested services are denied because documentation is neither showing improvement nor support for maintenance.

PR Clinical Rationale – Denial: This recipient has received services since [REDACTED]. According to The Florida Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy (9.5.c), one of the criteria for discharge from behavior analysis services is that data provided shows the recipient has made no progress toward any goals in the last 12 consecutive months. A review of the treatment plans from the previous 12 months shows minimal progress. There are maladaptive behaviors and skills that have been in treatment since [REDACTED], or added in [REDACTED] and have not reached mastery. According to the Florida Medicaid State Plan (Appendix 9.3.b), the data provided must show evidence that the frequency of the maladaptive behavior(s) has decreased since the last review and, if not, that there is a modification of the behavior plan. The recommendations for procedural modifications include: additions/changes to treatment plan to impact behaviors targeted for reduction. Procedural modifications should include one or more of the following: antecedent manipulation modifications, modifications of prompting procedures used in acquisition, modifications in consequence-based strategies – ones that either reduce maladaptive behavior or reinforce replacement behavior (e.g., manipulation of reinforcement schedules, switch to a different decelerative procedure), or if lack of progress was due to therapist error (e.g., poor data collection or poor training intervention methods), how you will address human error. The

provider has not addressed the lack of progress during the last observation period and did not amend the treatment plan sufficiently in relation to the lack of progress. The information submitted does not meet standards of care within the field of behavior analysis. This request is denied.

RCE 1 at 29 – 30.

6. In a Notice of Reconsideration Determination (“NRD”), dated October 17, 2023, Respondent upheld its decision. *Id.* at 41 – 44. The NRD explained the basis for the decision as follows:

PR Recon Determination: At reconsideration all documents were carefully reviewed. The recipient has been in services with this provider since [REDACTED]. The behaviors and goals show no progress and the graphs have inappropriate scales for skill acquisition goals (end below 100%) distorting progress. According to the Florida Medicaid State Plan (page 8, 6.2.3), the data provided must show evidence that the frequency of the maladaptive behavior(s) has decreased since the last review and, if not, that there is a modification of the behavior plan. The recommendations for procedural modifications include: additions/changes to treatment plan to impact behaviors targeted for reduction. Procedural modifications should include one or more of the following: antecedent manipulation modifications, modifications of prompting procedures used in acquisition, modifications in consequence-based strategies—ones that either reduce maladaptive behavior or reinforce replacement behavior (e.g., manipulation of reinforcement schedules, switch to a different decelerative procedure), or of progress was due to therapist error (e.g., poor data collection or poor training on intervention methods), how the provider will address human error. The provider has not addressed the lack of progress during the last observation period and did not amend the treatment plan sufficiently in relation to the lack of progress. The information submitted does not meet standards of care within the field of behavior analysis. The denial is upheld.

RCE 1 at 43.

7. On October 13, 2023, Petitioner requested a Fair Hearing to challenge the termination BA services. On November 20, 2023, the Office of Fair Hearings issued an Order Scheduling Fair Hearing and Prehearing Instructions, setting the hearing for December 11, 2023, at 9:30 a.m. EST.

8. Dr. Bicard is a BCBA and a Second Level Reviewer for eQHealth. Dr. Bicard testified as follows:

- a. In order for services to be medically necessary, they must meet all five (5) conditions of the medical necessity criteria. Dr. Bicard read the criteria into the record. *See* RCE 2 at 7.
- b. Petitioner has participated in BA services with this provider since [REDACTED].
- c. Provider submitted a treatment plan (the Reassessment) that showed Petitioner has not made progress during the authorization period, and that there were no sufficient changes to the treatment plan to continue care. This does not meet medically necessary criteria and does not meet specifications in the Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy. Dr. Bicard asserted that Criteria 3b in the BA Policy is not met because the data graphs do not show evidence that the frequency of the maladaptive behavior(s) has decreased since the last review and that there is a modification of the behavior plan to address the lack of progress. *See* RCE 2 at 46.
- d. The provider identified many behaviors that do not meet medically necessary criteria. In order for a behavior to meet medically necessary criteria it must significantly interfere with a recipient's activities of daily living ("ADLs"). *See* RCE 2 at 45. For Petitioner, the provider identified [REDACTED] as goals. Although these skills may be important for children to learn, they do not meet medically necessary criteria. A

BCBA is not required to teach these skills, can be learned in a less costly manner, and do not significantly interfere with Petitioner's life.

- e. There is no evidence submitted by the provider indicating that Petitioner has communication deficits. This means that Petitioner can [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- f. The data graphs for Petitioner's maladaptive behaviors do not meet standards of care in the field of behavior analysis as many of the behaviors should no longer be occurring after [REDACTED] of BA treatment especially given the Petitioner's functioning level. Moreover, it is difficult to determine what the provider is measuring. The numbers on the left side of the maladaptive behavior graphs are not standardized with all graphs beginning with zero (0), and there is no label or information on the graphs about what is being measured such as frequency, rate, or intervals of the behavior. All of the maladaptive behaviors show the same general trend, which is highly unusual and calls into question whether the data is authentic based on Dr. Bicard's experience in BA. When the data graphs do not meet standards of care and lack credibility, then interpretation of the data is impossible.
- g. The data graphs for Petitioner's replacement behaviors do not meet medically necessity criteria because they do not meet standards of care within the field of behavior analysis. The graphs should be labelled from 0% to 100% on the left side. None of the graphs provided by the provider are properly labelled from 0% to 100%. Most of the graphs are below 50%. After [REDACTED] of BA services, Petitioner

is only able to engage in any of the replacement behaviors in the treatment plan at less than half of the time. This is ineffective treatment and does not meet standards of care within the field of behavior analysis. The data graph for [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. See RCE 1 at 245. Neither of these behaviors significantly interferes with Petitioner's ADLs and are not appropriate goals for Petitioner. Dr. Bicard opined that the data graph for [REDACTED] [REDACTED] appropriately shows a skill that Petitioner should have mastered a long time ago. See RCE 1 at 246. Petitioner is [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. See RCE 1 at 246. The data graph for requesting attention shows that Petitioner is unable to do this skill. See RCE 1 at 247. All of Petitioner's replacement behaviors are around 50% or below; in the field of behavior analysis this is called chance level. This is an indication that this treatment plan is not effective for Petitioner. The treatment plan does not identify significant changes to the treatment plan that would be effective for Petitioner. Petitioner is not making significant progress.

h. Dr. Bicard agrees with Respondent's determination to terminate the BA services for Petitioner.

9. [REDACTED], Petitioner's Authorized Representative, testified as follows:

- a. Petitioner is [REDACTED].
- b. Petitioner [REDACTED].
- c. Petitioner's pediatrician recommended that Petitioner receive BA services.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

10. The Agency's Office of Fair Hearings has jurisdiction over the subject matter of this proceeding and the parties pursuant to section 409.285(2), Florida Statutes (2019). This order is the final administrative decision of AHCA under section 409.285(2)(a).

11. This hearing was held as a *de novo* proceeding pursuant to Fla. Admin. Code R. 59G-1.100(17)(b).

12. Because Respondent terminated a previously approved service, Fla. Admin. Code R. 59G-1.100(17)(b) assigns the burden of proof to the Respondent. The standard of proof in an administrative hearing is a preponderance of the evidence. The preponderance of the evidence standard requires proof by "the greater weight of the evidence" (Black's Law Dictionary at 1201, 7th Ed.).

13. The Florida Medicaid Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy (October 2017) ("BA Policy"), incorporated by reference in Fla. Admin. Code R. 59G-4.125, governs BA services available under Florida Medicaid. The BA Policy provides as follows:

1.0 Introduction

Behavior analysis (BA) services are highly structured interventions, strategies, and approaches provided to decrease maladaptive behaviors and increase or reinforce appropriate behaviors.

...

1.4.5 Medically Necessary/Medical Necessity

As defined in Rule 59G-1.010, F.A.C.

...

4.0 Coverage Information

4.1 General Criteria

Florida Medicaid covers services that meet all of the following:

- Are determined medically necessary
- Do not duplicate another service
- Meet the criteria as specified in this policy

4.2 Specific Criteria

Florida Medicaid covers the following BA services in accordance with the applicable Florida Medicaid fee schedule(s), or as specified in this policy:

4.2.1 Behavior Assessment

One per fiscal year, per recipient, when completed within 30 days of the start of the assessment.

4.2.2 Behavior Analysis

Up to 40 hours per week, per recipient, consisting of services identified on the recipient’s behavior plan in order to reduce maladaptive behaviors and to restore the recipient to his or her best possible functional level. Services include:

- Implementing behavior analysis interventions, and monitoring and assessing the recipient’s progress towards goals in the behavior plan
- Behavior analysis interventions, for example, discrete trial teaching, task analysis training, differential reinforcement, non-contingent reinforcement, conducting task analyses of complex responses, and teaching using chaining, prompting, fading, shaping, response cost, and extinction
- Training the recipient’s family, caregiver(s), and other involved persons on the implementation of the behavior plan and intervention strategies (the recipient must be present when clinically appropriate)

...
4.3 Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment

As required by federal law, Florida Medicaid provides services to eligible recipients under the age of 21 years, if such services are medically necessary to correct or ameliorate a defect, a condition, or a physical or mental illness. Included are diagnostic services, treatment, equipment, supplies, and other measures described in section 1905(a) of the Social Security Act, codified in Title 42 of the United States Code 1396d(a). As such, services for recipients under the age of 21 years exceeding the coverage described within this policy or the associated fee schedule may be approved, if medically necessary. For more information, please refer to Florida Medicaid’s General Policies on authorization requirements.

RCE 2 at 40 – 42.

14. Appendix 9.0 of the BA Policy provides Review Criteria for Behavior Analysis Services.

These Review Criteria state as follows:

Review Criteria for Behavior Analysis Services

Behavior analysis (BA) services are considered as either the treatment of choice or as an adjunct treatment modality for a variety of conditions and disorders where maladaptive behaviors are part of the recipient’s clinical presentation, including behavioral manifestations of diagnoses such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and other behavioral health conditions.

Critical Elements Necessary for ANY Type of Behavior Analysis Service:

The following critical elements **MUST** be satisfied to qualify for BA services:

- a. Eligibility – The recipient must meet all criteria for BA services as outlined in the Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy, Rule 59G-4.125, F.A.C.
- b. Medical necessity – The recipient must meet medical necessity criteria as outlined in Rule 59G-1.010, F.A.C.
- c. The recipient currently engages in maladaptive behaviors
- d. These maladaptive behaviors interfere with the recipient's daily functioning

1. Criteria for Initial Behavior Analysis Assessment - BOTH of the following **MUST** be satisfied:

- a. **ALL** critical elements are met
- b. Provide submits a valid written physician's order as stipulated in the Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy, Rule 59G-4.125, F.A.C.

2. Criteria for Behavior Analysis Services and Reassessments – ALL of the following **MUST** be satisfied:

- a. **ALL** critical elements are met
- b. An assessment or, if applicable, a reassessment, authored by a lead analyst, is provided. An assessment of the maladaptive behavior(s) is a necessary element of the process of identifying the frequency and magnitude of the behaviors as well as the variables associated with the occurrence of the maladaptive behavior(s). This helps in defining what are the functional consequences of the problem behavior(s) so that an adequate behavior plan can be implemented. This (re)assessment **MUST** include, at a minimum, **ALL** of the following:
 - i. A clear operational description of the maladaptive behavior(s)
 - ...
- c. A behavior plan authored or updated by a lead analyst. The behavior plan is the cornerstone of the delivery of behavior analysis services and it is based on the information obtained in the assessment. It proposes specific interventions to reduce or eliminate the maladaptive behavior. These interventions take into consideration the variables, both present before the behavior, as well as after the behavior, that influence the occurrence of the maladaptive behavior(s). This plan also includes replacement appropriate behaviors for the recipient to engage in instead of the maladaptive behaviors in order to obtain the same function. The plan must be detailed enough to warrant the requested services and include mechanisms to monitor its effectiveness. This **MUST** include, at a minimum, **ALL** of the following:
 - i. Observable and measurable descriptions of the maladaptive behavior(s)

- ii. Identified function of the maladaptive behavior(s) behavior as a result of the assessment or reassessment conducted
- iii. Goals and strategies for changing the maladaptive behavior(s)
- iv. Written detailed description of when, where, and how often these goals will be addressed and proposed strategies will be implemented
- v. System for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the plan
- vi. Safety and crisis plan, if applicable
- vii. Summary and recommendations
- viii. Discharge criteria
- ix. Transition plan (if applicable)

NOTE: Although the assessment and behavior plan were addressed separately in section 2, both of them can be submitted as a single document.

3. Criteria for Continuation of Treatment at the Present Level and/or Using Current Methods: Providers must ensure that ALL of the following criteria are met to request continuation of treatments at the present level or using the current methods. If criteria for 3a is met, but criteria for 3b and/or 3c are not met, then a reduction of the treatment level and/or change of treatment methods may be warranted.

- a. ALL criteria listed in 2a, 2b, and 2c regarding critical elements, assessment or reassessment, and behavior plan, are met.
- b. The data provided must show evidence that the frequency of the maladaptive behavior(s) has decreased since the last review and, if not, that there is a modification of the behavior plan.
- c. The level of functional impairment justifies continuation of BA services. The reviewer utilizes the information provided below as a guide as it relates to the level of functional impairment as expressed through the following behaviors:
 - i. Safety – aggression, self-injury, property destruction, elopement
 - ii. Communication – problems with expressive/receptive language, poor understanding or use of non-verbal communications, stereotyped, repetitive language
 - iii. Self-stimulating, abnormal, inflexible, or intense preoccupations
 - iv. Self-care – difficulty recognizing risks or danger, grooming, eating, or toileting
 - v. Other – behaviors not identified above

4. Criteria to Assess the Intensity of Behavior Analysis Services: Providers may request up to

40 hours of BA services per week, per recipient, based upon the following:

As a rule, higher number of maladaptive behaviors, higher severity and frequency of behaviors, as well as the multiplicity of settings where the behaviors occur, would usually justify a higher number of services hours. The greater the number of goals targeted to reduce maladaptive behaviors, the more the likelihood that a higher number of services hours could also be warranted.

Providers **MUST** ensure that proper justification for the requested hours of services is adequately documented in the behavior plan. Based on the information provided in the assessment, behavior plan, and any other supporting documentation, the reviewer utilizes the information provided below as a guide as it relates to the level of functional impairment as expressed through the following behaviors:

- i. i. Safety - aggression, self-injury, property destruction, elopement
- ii. ii. Communication - problems with expressive/receptive language, poor understanding or use of
- iii. non-verbal communications, stereotyped, repetitive language
- iv. iii. Self-stimulating, abnormal, inflexible, or intense preoccupations
- v. iv. Self-care - difficulty recognizing risks or danger, grooming, eating, or toileting
- vi. v. Other- behaviors not identified above

5. Criteria for Discharge from Behavior Analysis Services - ONE or MORE of the following **MUST** be satisfied:

- a. The critical elements are **no longer met**.
- b. The data provided shows that the frequency and severity of maladaptive behavior(s) has declined to the point that they no longer pose a barrier to the child's ability to function in his/her environment.
- c. The data provided shows the recipient has made no progress toward any goals in the last 12 consecutive months.
- d. The level of functional impairment as expressed through behaviors no longer justifies continued BA services.
- e. Parent/guardian withdraws consent for treatment.

The reviewer utilizes the information provided below as a guide as it relates to the level of functional impairment as expressed through the following behaviors:

- i. Safety - aggression, self-injury, property destruction, elopement
- ii. Communication - problems with expressive/receptive language, poor understanding or use of
- non-verbal communications, stereotyped, repetitive language
- iii. Self-stimulating, abnormal, inflexible, or intense preoccupations
- iv. Self-care - difficulty recognizing risks or danger, grooming, eating, or toileting
- v. Other- behaviors not identified above

When applicable, the recipient would be transitioned to other appropriate services.

...

RCE 2 at 45 – 46.

15. States must provide Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (“EPSDT”) services to Medicaid-eligible children under age 21 when requested under the Medicaid state plan. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 1396a(a)(43); 42 U.S.C. § 1396d(a)(4). According to 42 U.S.C. § 1396d(r)(5), EPSDT services mean, in relevant part, the following items and services:

Such other necessary health care, diagnostic services, treatment, and other measures described in subsection (a) of this section to correct or ameliorate defects and physical and mental illness and conditions discovered by the screen services, whether or not such services are covered under the state plan.

RCE 2 at 4 – 5.

16. Petitioner is under age 21, and therefore EPSDT applies to ■■■ request for services. However, a state may place medical necessity limitations on EPSDT services. *See* 42 C.F.R. §§ 440.230(a), (b), (d). Fla. Stat. § 409.905(2) limits EPSDT services with a medical necessity standard:

The [Agency] shall pay for early and periodic screening and diagnosis of a recipient under age 21 to ascertain physical and mental problems and conditions and all services determined by the agency to be medically necessary for the treatment, correction, or amelioration of these problems and conditions, including personal care, private duty nursing, durable medical equipment, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, respiratory therapy, and immunizations.

RCE 2 at 13.

17. Section 2.83 of the Definitions Policy, incorporated by reference in Fla. Admin. Code R. 59G-1.010, defines “Medically Necessary” or “Medical Necessity” as follows:

The medical or allied care, goods, or services furnished or ordered must meet the following conditions:

- Be necessary to protect life, to prevent significant illness or significant disability, or to alleviate pain
- Be individualized, specific, and consistent with symptoms or confirmed diagnosis of the illness or injury under treatment, and not in excess of the patient's needs
- Be consistent with generally accepted professional medical standards as determined by the Medicaid program, and not experimental or investigational
- Be reflective of the level of service that can be safely furnished, and for which no equally effective and more conservative or less costly treatment is available statewide
- Be furnished in a manner not primarily intended for the convenience of the recipient, the recipient's caretaker, or the provider

The fact that a provider has prescribed, recommended, or approved medical or allied care, goods, or services does not, in itself, make such care, goods or services medically necessary or a medical necessity or a covered service.

RCE 2 at 23.

18. The Florida Medicaid Authorization Requirements Policy ("Authorization Requirements Policy") incorporated by reference in Fla. Admin. Code R. 59G-1.053, provides as follows:

3.2.1 Continued Authorization Requests

The QIO shall not deny or reduce the amount, frequency, or duration of a service that is already being provided, unless:

- The reduction is to correct for factual errors or omissions in prior certifications.
- There is a documented improvement in the recipient's medical condition.
- There is a documented change in the recipient's circumstances.
- The reviewing physician determines the recipient will not gain any additional benefit by continuing services at the current level.

RCE 2 at 34.

19. In the instant case, Respondent terminated Petitioner's ABA services. See ¶ 5. The data did not show sufficient improvement in the maladaptive behaviors. See ¶ 3, 8. In the NOO dated September 7, 2023, Respondent explained that continuing services with the current provider

were not medically necessary, specifically, that it did not meet the requirements that services must be “[c]onsistent with generally accepted professional medical standards as determined by the Medicaid program, and not experimental or investigation.” See ¶ 5. Respondent further explained that “[r]equested services are denied because documentation is neither showing improvement nor support for maintenance” and that the “provider has not addressed the lack of progress during the last observation period and did not amend the treatment plan sufficiently in relation to the lack of progress.” See ¶ 5.

20. As provided by the EPSDT requirements, the recipient must meet the medical necessity criteria as outlined in Fla. Admin. Code R. 59G-1.010. See ¶ 15. As provided in section 2.83 of the Definitions Policy, a component of medical necessity is that services must be “consistent with generally accepted professional medical standards as determined by the Medicaid program, and not experimental or investigational”. See ¶ 17. As shown by the record, Petitioner’s submitted Reassessment does not show sufficient improvement regarding the reduction of maladaptive behaviors and little improvement in increasing Petitioner’s replacement behaviors. See ¶ 3 – 4, 8. As Dr. Bicard testified there has been insufficient progress over the course of [REDACTED] of treatment and there is indication that the treatment plan is not effective for Petitioner. See ¶ 8. Dr. Bicard established that the treatment plan did not identify significant changes to the treatment plan that would be effective for Petitioner. See ¶ 8. Further, the Reassessment included replacement skills that do not require a BCBA to teach these skills, can be learned in a less costly manner, and do not significantly interfere with Petitioner’s life. See ¶ 8. With regard to replacement behaviors, Dr. Bicard established that, after [REDACTED] of BA services with this provider, most of the data graphs are at or below 50%, which is chance level progress. Finally, Dr.

Bicard agreed with the Respondent's determination to terminate the BA services for Petitioner. In all, based on Dr. Bicard's credible and convincing testimony and the lack of progress in the treatment, Respondent demonstrated that the provider's treatment is not "consistent with generally accepted professional medical standards as determined by the Medicaid program."

21. As QIO for the Agency, eQHealth is authorized to terminate services when "the reviewing physician determines the recipient will not gain any additional benefit by continuing services at the current level." See ¶ 18. As discussed, supra ¶ 19 – 21, the treatment plan is ineffective. Petitioner's lack of improvement is well documented.

22. Upon consideration of the testimony provided, Respondent's Composite Exhibit 1, Respondent's Composite Exhibit 2, the EPSDT policy, and other applicable policies, the undersigned concludes that Respondent proved by a preponderance of the evidence that the ABA services at issue do not meet medical necessity criteria. Looking at all the evidence relevant to the particular needs of Petitioner, Respondent has demonstrated that the previously authorized services, based on the treatment plans at issue in this case, are not necessary to correct or ameliorate a defect or a physical and mental illness or condition. Accordingly, Respondent proved by a preponderance of the evidence that Respondent's termination of BA services was correct.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND ADJUDGED THAT:

Respondent's termination of BA services is **AFFIRMED**. Petitioner's appeal based on Respondent's termination is **DENIED**.

DONE AND ORDERED this 25 day of January, 2024 in Tallahassee, Leon County, Florida.



Kameisha Presley

23-FH2651

2024.01.25

10:11:01 -05'00'

KAMEISHA PRESLEY, Hearing Officer
Agency for Health Care Administration
Office of Fair Hearings
2727 Mahan Drive, Mail Stop # 11
Tallahassee, FL 32308-5407

NOTICE OF A RIGHT TO JUDICIAL REVIEW

A PARTY WHO IS ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY THIS FINAL ORDER IS ENTITLED TO JUDICIAL REVIEW, WHICH SHALL BE INSTITUTED BY FILING THE ORIGINAL NOTICE OF APPEAL WITH THE AGENCY CLERK OF AHCA, AND A COPY, ALONG WITH THE FILING FEE PRESCRIBED BY LAW, WITH THE DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL IN THE APPELLATE DISTRICT WHERE THE AGENCY MAINTAINS ITS HEADQUARTERS OR WHERE A PARTY RESIDES. REVIEW PROCEEDINGS SHALL BE CONDUCTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FLORIDA APPELLATE RULES. THE NOTICE OF APPEAL MUST BE FILED WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE RENDITION OF THE ORDER TO BE REVIEWED.

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