



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

FILED

May 10, 2024, 2:51 pm

OFFICE OF FAIR HEARINGS

[REDACTED]

PETITIONER,

AHCA Case No.: 24-FH0318

vs.

AGENCY FOR HEALTH CARE
ADMINISTRATION,

RESPONDENT.

_____ /

FINAL ORDER

Pursuant to notice, the undersigned convened a telephonic Fair Hearing on the instant case on April 3, 2024, at 12:54 p.m. Eastern Standard Time ("EST").

APPEARANCES

For the Petitioner:

[REDACTED]

Petitioner's Authorized Representative

For the Respondent:

Marielisa Amador
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 decision to terminate Petitioner's Behavior Analysis ("BA" or "ABA") services was correct.

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

All parties and witnesses appeared telephonically. Petitioner's Authorized Representative from [REDACTED], [REDACTED] (" [REDACTED] "), Board Certified Behavior

Analyst (“BCBA”), appeared on behalf of Petitioner. The following attended as witnesses for Petitioner: [REDACTED] (“[REDACTED]”), [REDACTED] Director; [REDACTED] (“[REDACTED]”), [REDACTED] of Petitioner; and [REDACTED] (“[REDACTED]”), [REDACTED] of Petitioner.

Marielisa Amador (“Ms. Amador”), Medical/Health Care Program Analyst for the Agency for Health Care Administration (“Agency” or “AHCA”), appeared on behalf of Respondent. Dr. Alyssa Conway (“Dr. Conway”), Second Level Reviewer and Board Certified Behavior Analyst for eQHealth Solutions Inc. (“eQHealth”), appeared as a witness for Respondent.

Petitioner did not introduce any exhibits at the hearing. Prior to the hearing, Respondent sent to the Office of Fair Hearings and Petitioner a seven-hundred and eighty-two (782)-page evidence packet and a forty-nine (49)-page evidence packet. The seven-hundred and eighty-two (782)-page evidence packet appears in the Office of Fair Hearings’ document management system as the file titles: “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 1-109.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 110-168.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 169-242.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 243-285.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 286-314.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 315-352.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 353-429.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 430-477.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 478-547.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 548-587.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 588-625.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 626-660.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 661-701.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 702-729.pdf”; “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 730-757.pdf”; and “[REDACTED] FH 04.03.2024 758-782.pdf”. The forty-nine (49)-page evidence packet appears in the Office of Fair Hearings’ document management system as the file title “24-FH0318 AHCA Evidence (Pages 1-49 of 49).pdf”. Absent an objection from the Petitioner, the undersigned admitted the seven-hundred and eighty-two (782)-page evidence packet into evidence as Respondent’s Composite

Exhibit 1 (“RCE 1”) and the forty-nine (49)-page evidence packet into evidence as Respondent’s Composite Exhibit 2 (“RCE 2”).

FINDINGS OF FACT

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

2. Petitioner is [REDACTED]. RCE 1 at 16. Petitioner is diagnosed with [REDACTED].
Id.

3. According to Petitioner’s Treatment Plan, Petitioner is engaging in the following maladaptive behaviors: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; and [REDACTED].
[REDACTED] *Id.* at 721-725.

4. Petitioner requested continuation of BA services; specifically, 2,704 units of code 97153; 520 units of code 97154; 52 units of code 97155; 468 units of code 97155 (HN); and 52 units of code 97156. *Id.* at 24-25. In a Notice of Outcome (“NOO”), dated January 18, 2024, Respondent terminated Petitioner’s ABA services. *Id.* The NOO explained the basis for the termination as follows:

[T]he requested services are not medically necessary under the following standard(s):

Not duplicative of services being rendered by another party.
Individualized, specific, and consistent with symptoms or confirmed diagnosis of the illness under treatment, and not in excess of the patient’s needs.

The NOO further provided:

PR Clinical Rationale – Denial: , Calming/coping/relaxation / de-escalation (pg 57) strategies are not an empirically supported procedures within the conceptual system of behavior analysis for treating the functions of maladaptive behavior. According to Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy (page 2, 1.1), treatment that does not meet generally accepted standards of care within the field of applied behavior analysis are not covered under the behavior analysis service coverage policy. Further, The recipient of ABA therapy services must engage in maladaptive behavior that interferes with the recipient’s daily functioning for which ABA therapy is medically necessary. There are behaviors that do not meet medical necessity criteria ([REDACTED]). Please remove these FurtherPlease note that goals within the plan may not conform to standards of care within the([REDACTED]). The definitions of behaviors under treatment must be written according to generally accepted practice within the field of ABA and according to AHCA standards set in Florida Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy (page 7, 6.2.2). The behavioral definitions must be clear, complete, objective and free of unobservable intentional states. The behaviors should have clear boundaries, definite on-sets and off-sets, should not overlap with other target behaviors definitions, and not be a listing of behaviors that the recipient does not engaging in. The behavior definition for “[REDACTED]” in this treatment plan do not conform to generally accepted standards of care within the field of applied behavior analysis. The provider was requested to review and amend the definitions and the provider did not respond to the request. This request is denied.

...

Id. at 24-25

5. Petitioner requested reconsideration of the Respondent’s decision. In a Notice of Reconsideration Determination (“NRD”), dated February 1, 2024, Respondent upheld its decision. *Id.* at 36-37. The NRD explained the basis for the decision as follows:

PR Recon Determination: At reconsideration all documents were carefully reviewed. The supporting documentation does not meet generally accepted practices within the field of applied behavior analysis and standards set forth in the Florida Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy. The Provider listed goals for maladaptive behaviors and skill acquisition in this treatment plan that do not meeting medical necessity criteria. According to the Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy these goals are not necessary to protect life, to prevent significant illness, significant disability, or to alleviate severe pain. That are not consistent with the symptoms of the diagnosis for which ABA is medically necessary. These are skills that do not require a behavior analyst to teach. The can be learned in a less costly and equally effective manner by someone not specifically trained in

ABA. They are furnished in a manner primarily intended for the convience of recipient, the recipient's caretaker, or the provider. The provider was requested to review all goals to make sure they conformed to the Behavior Analysis Service Coverage Policy. This denial is upheld.

...

Id.

6. On January 29, 2024, Petitioner requested a Fair Hearing to challenge the termination of ABA services. On March 5, 2024, the undersigned issued an Order Scheduling Fair Hearing by Telephone and Prehearing Instructions, setting the hearing for April 3, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. EST.

7. Dr. Conway is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst at the doctoral level. Dr. Conway testified to the following at the Fair Hearing:

a. This Treatment Plan has been reviewed by three Board Certified Behavior Analysts at the Masters and Doctoral levels to determine medical necessity. Petitioner has been in services with this provider since [REDACTED]. The Treatment Plan contains goals that do not meet medical necessity criteria, as they are not objective or observable, and can be targeted with a lower level of care.

b. Some of the behaviors do meet medical necessity criteria, including [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. *Id.* at 721. The provider was instructed to remove behaviors of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] *Id.* at 725. [REDACTED] does not warrant intensive ABA services, and can be targeted at a lower level of care. [REDACTED] is a low severity behavior and does not severely impact daily functioning. These behaviors do not meet medical necessity. Regarding replacement skills, [REDACTED] is not

accurately observable or measurable. *Id.* at 743. [REDACTED] cannot be measured or observed and can be targeted at a lower level of care. *Id.* at 746. [REDACTED] does not clearly define “appropriately.” *Id.* at 753. [REDACTED] are occupational and vocational goals which can be targeted at a lower level of care and do not require intensive ABA services. *Id.* at 756. The Treatment Plan is teaching Petitioner [REDACTED]. This is not a replacement skill for the problem behaviors [REDACTED]

- c. The provider indicated that Petitioner does not have alternative services, but an individual not having services currently does not mean the individual cannot have those services, nor that the behaviors cannot be targeted at a lower level of care. Although Petitioner is showing progress across behaviors and goals, the provider was notified that behaviors do not meet medical necessity. The provider did not remove the goals. When goals and behaviors in the plan do not meet medical necessity criteria, services must be denied. If there are goals that do not meet medical necessity criteria, services cannot be approved, even when there are other goals that may meet medical necessity criteria. An individual engaging in certain behaviors does not make ABA an appropriate fit for those targets. The denial was not related to lack of progress, as Petitioner is making progress. The level of service was also not questioned. The goals that can be targeted at a lower level of care may be more appropriate for other therapies, in addition to therapies already provided.

8. [REDACTED] is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. [REDACTED] testified to the following at the Fair Hearing:

- a. Petitioner has been in services with this provider since [REDACTED], and eQHealth has approved services every six months since the start of treatment. Services have been effective. Petitioner shows progress but experiences [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. Petitioner's recommendation for ABA was provided by a third party doctor through a diagnostic evaluation and a referral from Petitioner's primary care physician.
- b. Most of the Treatment Plan meets medical necessity criteria. All behaviors and replacement skills are aligned with Petitioner's diagnosis and medical necessity criteria. Without ABA therapy, Petitioner does not have access to less restrictive therapies.

9. [REDACTED] is the Director of [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] testified to the following at the Fair Hearing:

- a. [REDACTED] is a master's level Board Certified Behavior Analyst. Petitioner has been in services with this provider for a little over [REDACTED]. Petitioner predominantly engages in [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] Petitioner's behaviors escalate, and [REDACTED] engages in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], which involves [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. Other clients in the area need to be removed.

b. Petitioner is [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

c. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are reliable precursors to behaviors of [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED]. As the provider has redirected from those patterns, the provider has been able to reduce problem behaviors. The provider stated research in ABA supports that responding to a precursor to a severe behavior with the same function would reduce the behavior as well. [REDACTED] indicate deficits in [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

d. In teaching Petitioner to [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

10. [REDACTED] is the [REDACTED] of Petitioner. [REDACTED] testified to the following at the Fair Hearing:

a. Petitioner had a lot of difficulty [REDACTED] when [REDACTED] joined the Behavioral Center, and engaged in [REDACTED] that would last many hours. Petitioner is now [REDACTED], but not to the point where [REDACTED] can [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is grateful for the center and its intervention. Petitioner's behaviors still occur.

b. Petitioner regularly sees a primary care doctor, neurologist, and a pulmonologist. Petitioner will begin seeing a GI specialist due to health issues. The neurologist and primary care doctor recommended ABA therapy. These doctors have not recommended therapies in place of ABA, but have recommended therapies in

addition to ABA, such as occupational and speech therapy. Petitioner does not currently receive these therapies.

11. [REDACTED] is the [REDACTED] of Petitioner. [REDACTED] testified to the following at the Fair Hearing:

- a. [REDACTED] previously was unable to take Petitioner to the supermarket due to [REDACTED], but Petitioner can now go to the store. Petitioner can go to the park. [REDACTED] stated therapy has been a blessing.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

12. 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).

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

14. Because Respondent terminated a previously approved service, Fla. Admin. Code R. 59G-1.100(17)(g) 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.)

15. The Florida Medicaid Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy (September 2023) (“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.

...

1.4.6 Medically Necessary/Medical Necessity

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

...

2.0 Eligible Recipient

...

2.2 Who Can Receive

Florida Medicaid recipients under the age of 21 years requiring BA services that are medically necessary to address behavior that impairs a recipient's ability to perform a major life activity. Such functional impairment is expressed through the following behaviors:

- Safety – aggression, self-injury, property destruction, elopement
- Communication – problems with expressive/receptive language, poor understanding or use of non-verbal communications, stereotyped, repetitive language
- Self-stimulating – abnormal, inflexible, or intense preoccupations
- Self-care – difficulty recognizing risks or danger, grooming, eating, or toileting
- Other behaviors not identified above but not limited to complexity of treatment, programming, or environmental variables

The recipient must be referred by an independent physician or practitioner qualified to assess and diagnose disorders related to functional impairment, including:

- Primary care physician with family practice, internal medicine, or pediatric specialty
- Board certified or board eligible physician with specialty in developmental behavioral pediatrics, neurodevelopmental pediatrics, pediatric neurology, adult or child psychiatry
- Child psychologist

The referral must include a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation (CDE) performed according to national evidence-based practice standards. CDEs may be performed by a multidisciplinary team or individual practitioner. In either case, the CDE must be led by a licensed practitioner working within their scope of practice. The CDE must include assessment findings and treatment recommendations appropriate to the recipient. For example, the CDE may include data from behavioral reports by parents, guardians, and/or teachers; diagnostic testing related to recipients' development, behavior, hearing, and/or vision; genetic testing; and/or other neurological and/or medical testing.

Some services may be subject to additional coverage criteria as specified in section 4.0.

...

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 and Behavior Plan

A behavior assessment must be conducted prior to the initiation of behavior analysis interventions. The assessment must identify behavioral deficits that interfere with a major life activity including the events and subsequent interactions that elicit and sustain targeted behavior.

The initial assessment must include the administration, scoring, and reporting of two core standardized behavior instruments, as follows:

- Vineland-3 Comprehensive Parent Interview Form Including Maladaptive Behavior Domain, for all recipients
- Behavior Assessment System for Children, Third Edition, Parenting Relationship Questionnaire (BASC-3 PRQ), for all recipients 2 years old and less than 19 years old

The complete scoring report, including outcome measure scores, must be submitted with service prior authorization requests. Additional assessment tools may be used at the Lead Analyst's discretion.

The behavior plan identifies intervention strategies that are likely to eliminate, mitigate or replace the behavior to produce change sufficient to reengage the recipient in the major life activity. The plan must include specific behavior goal(s), intervention strategies for each goal, anticipated timeframes that are of sufficient duration to address the targeted behavior, and how the ongoing progress of intervention strategies will be reported.

The behavior plan must reflect the requested authorization period (up to six months).

A reassessment and updated behavior plan to renew prior authorization for continued services must be completed at least every six months. The core instruments must be included with reassessments every 12 months.

More frequent assessments must be conducted when:

- New behavior emerges that interferes with a recipient's participation in a major life activity
- Additional BA services are medically necessary and are likely to address the emergent behavior

A full reassessment may be requested if there is a change in provider; however, a change of a practitioner status (e.g., an RBT becoming certified as a BCaBA) is not grounds for conducting a reassessment or updating a behavior plan.

4.2.2 Behavior Analysis Interventions

Florida Medicaid covers up to 40 hours per week of BA intervention services as indicated in the recipient's prior-authorized behavior plan. These services must be delivered to reduce maladaptive behaviors and assist the recipient reach the best possible function level for that individual. Services include:

- Adaptive behavior treatment by protocol - behavior analysis services provided according to the authorized treatment protocol
 - Services may be provided by Lead Analyst, BCaBA, or RBT
- Adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification – behavior analysis services provided with modifications to the authorized treatment protocol to address behavior and/or response changes or progress
 - Services may be provided by Lead Analyst or BCaBA
- Group adaptive behavior treatment by protocol – behavior analysis services provided in a group setting according to the authorized treatment protocol
 - Maximum group size is six recipients
 - Services may be provided by Lead Analyst, BCaBA, or RBT
- Group adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification – behavior analysis services provided in a group setting with modifications to the authorized treatment protocol to address behavior and/or response changes or progress
 - Maximum group size is six recipients
 - Services may be provided by Lead Analyst or BCaBA
- Family adaptive behavior treatment guidance – parent, guardian, and/or caregiver training on the implementation of the behavior plan and intervention strategies
 - The recipient may or may not be present depending upon clinical appropriateness.
 - Services may be provided by Lead Analyst or BCaBA
 - The Lead Analyst may provide up to two hours per week of training to parents or guardians via telemedicine in accordance with Rule 59G-1.057, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.)

...

4.2.4 Discharge

Recipients receiving Florida Medicaid BA services who meet one or more of the following will be considered for discharge from services:

- The recipient is no longer eligible for BA services as outlined in the Florida Medicaid Behavior Analysis Services Coverage Policy, incorporated by reference in Rule 59G-4.125, F.A.C.
- The recipient no longer meets medical necessity criteria as defined in Rule 59G-1.010, F.A.C.
- The recipient no longer engages in maladaptive behaviors.
- Data indicates the frequency and severity of maladaptive behavior(s) or level functional impairment no longer poses a barrier to the recipient's ability to function in his/her environment.
- The level of functional impairment as expressed through behaviors no longer justifies continued BA services.
- Parent or guardian withdraws consent for treatment

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 sectioned 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 Authorization Requirements Policy.

...

5.0 Exclusion

5.1 General Non-Covered Criteria

Services related to this policy are not covered when any of the following apply:

- The service does not meet the medical necessity criteria listed in section 1.0
- The recipient does not meet the eligibility requirements listed in section 2.0
- The service unnecessarily duplicates another provider's service

5.2 Specific Non-Covered Criteria

Florida Medicaid does not cover the following as part of this service benefit:

- Any procedure or physical crisis management technique that involves the use of seclusion or manual, technical, or chemical restraint utilized to control behaviors
- Services for the delivery of recipient supervision, personal care assistance (e.g., acting as a 1:1 aid), companion, chaperone, or shadow regardless of activity or setting. This may include supports and services that are reimbursed through a different Florida Medicaid service benefit or are able to be provided by individuals without professional skills or training.

- Caregiver or childcare services
- Psychological testing, neuropsychology, psychotherapy, cognitive therapy, sex therapy, psychoanalysis, hypnotherapy, or long-term counseling
- Services funded under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Services not listed on the fee schedule
- Services on the same day as behavioral health overlay services*
- Services on the same day as therapeutic behavioral on-site services*
- Services on the same day as therapeutic group care services*
- Services provided simultaneously by more than one BA provider, unless determined to be medically necessary, prior authorized, and indicated in the approved behavior plan
- Travel Time

* These services include behavior analysis treatment.

Florida Medicaid may cover some services listed in this section through a different service benefit.

6.0 Documentation

6.2 Specific Criteria

Providers must maintain the following documentation in the recipient's file:

6.2.1 Referral Information

Original referral documentation must be maintained in the recipient's medical record.

6.2.2 Behavior Assessment and Behavior Plan

The behavior assessment and behavior plan must be signed by the Lead Analyst and the recipient's parent or guardian. Each behavior assessment and behavior plan must include:

- Patient information
- Reason for referral
- Medical and developmental history, including medications prescribed to ameliorate behaviors
- Relevant family history
- Clinical interview
- Review of recent assessments/reports (file review)
- Assessment procedures and results
- Behavior plan
 - Treatment setting(s)
 - Proposed treatment targets, goals, and objectives related to medically necessary behavioral interventions
 - For each:
 - Definition in observable, measurable terms
 - Direct observation and measurement procedures
 - Current level (baseline)
 - Behavior reduction or acquisition procedures

- Condition(s) under which behavior is to be demonstrated and mastery criteria
 - Date of introduction
 - Estimated date of mastery
 - Plan for generalization
 - Timely reporting of progress, including statements as to whether goal or objective is met; not met; or, modified (with explanation)
- Parent/guardian/caregiver training
 - Proposed targets, goals, and objectives (as above)
 - Training procedures
 - Date of introduction
 - Estimated date of mastery
- Number of units requested
 - Number of units for each billing code
 - Medical necessity for units requested
- Supervision plan, including name(s) of authorized supervisor(s)
- Care coordination with parents/caregivers, schools, state disability programs, and others as applicable
- Transition (fading) plan
- Crisis management plan
- Discharge plan

6.2.3 Assessment and Behavior Plan for Reauthorization and Continuation of Services

In addition to the documentation requirements indicated in 6.2.2, subsequent assessments and behavior plans for reauthorization and continuation of services must include:

- Data reflecting progress of all behaviors targeted for improvement. Each behavior under treatment must have its own data table and corresponding graph.
- A narrative discussion of progress and a statement of justification for continuation of care at the intensity level requested

If significant clinical progress is not made over the course of an authorized period, the provider must explain why clinically significant progress was not made and treatment changes to promote progress.

...

Pages 1 – 8 of BA Policy.

16. 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[®](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.

Id. at 4-5.

17. Petitioner is under age 21, and therefore EPSDT applies to [REDACTED] 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.

Id. at page 6.

18. 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.

Id. at 23.

19. The Florida Medicaid Authorization Requirements Policy (“Authorization 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 error 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.

Id. at page 34.

20. In the instant case, Respondent terminated Petitioner’s ABA services. *See* ¶ 4. In the NOO dated January 18, 2024, Respondent explained that continuing services at the prior level was not medically necessary, specifically, that it did not meet the requirements that services must “not [be] duplicative of services being rendered by another party”, and must be “individualized, specific, and consistent with symptoms or confirmed diagnosis of the illness under treatment, and not in excess of the patient’s needs.” *Id.* Respondent further explained that “treatment that does not meet generally accepted standards of care within the field of applied behavior analysis [is] not covered under the behavior analysis service coverage policy.” *Id.*

21. 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* ¶ 16,17. As provided in section 2.83 of

the Definitions Policy, two components of medical necessity are that services must “not [be] duplicative of services being rendered by another party”, and must be “individualized, specific, and consistent with symptoms or confirmed diagnosis of the illness under treatment, and not in excess of the patient’s needs.” See ¶ 18. As shown by the record, the provider’s Treatment Plan contains behavior goals and replacement skills that do not meet medical necessity criteria, and, as such, are not covered services. See ¶ 7. Dr. Conway provided credible testimony that some of the plan’s goals do not meet medical necessity criteria, as they are not objective or observable, and they can be targeted with a lower level of care. *Id.* Dr. Conway noted that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] do not warrant intensive ABA services. *Id.* Dr. Conway further noted that [REDACTED] cannot be measured or observed, and [REDACTED] is an occupational or vocational goal. *Id.* The provider was notified that these behaviors do not meet medical necessity and did not remove the goals from the plan. *Id.* Dr. Conway also asserted that services cannot be approved if the Treatment Plan contains goals that do not meet medical necessity criteria, even if other goals do meet medical necessity criteria. *Id.* Furthermore, Petitioner testified to the recommendations by doctors and providers regarding ABA therapy, but “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.” See ¶ 18. As the Treatment Plan contains goals that do not meet medical necessity, the Treatment Plan is not “consistent with generally accepted professional medical standards” within the field of ABA, nor is it “individualized, specific, and consistent” with Petitioner’s confirmed diagnosis. As such, Respondent has demonstrated that it is not medically necessary to continue services with the current provider.

22. 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 ¶ 19. As discussed, the provider’s Treatment Plan contains goals which do not meet medical necessity, which precludes the approval and coverage of services. Here, the insufficiencies of the Treatment Plan are well documented.

23. Upon consideration of the testimony provided, evidence submitted, and applicable polices, the undersigned concludes that Respondent proved by a preponderance of the evidence that the termination of ABA services was medically necessary. Looking at all the evidence relevant to the particular needs of Petitioner, Respondent has demonstrated that the previously authorized services, based on the Treatment Plan 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 ABA services was correct.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND ADJUDGED THAT:

Respondent’s termination of ABA services is **AFFIRMED**. Petitioner’s appeal based on Respondent’s termination is **DENIED**.

DONE and ORDERED this 10th day of May, 2024, in Tallahassee, Leon County, Florida.



Lynne Ringers
24-FH0318
2024.05.10 09:32:25
-04'00'

LYNNE RINGERS, 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.

Copies Furnished To:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

AHCA Medicaid Hearing Unit
MedicaidHearingUnit@ahca.myflorida.com