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April 15, 2019

Group Insurance Board
c/o Board Liaison
Department of Employee Trust Funds
PO Box 7931
Madison, WI 53707-7931
Sent via email to boardfeedback@etf.wi.gov

Dear Members of the Group Insurance Board:

It has come to my attention that you intend to vote at your May meeting on an earlier recommendation to include bariatric surgery among the covered benefits for state employees beginning in plan year 2019. I am pleased to learn you are considering coverage for bariatric surgery. It is a highly effective treatment for severe obesity which affects 15 to 20 percent of Wisconsin state employees.

It's no secret that obesity puts patients on the path to serious and costly chronic conditions that include coronary artery disease, heart attack and heart failure, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes and even cancer. However, obesity can also take a significant toll on the patient's quality-of-life even when those serious conditions aren't present due to lack of mobility, sleeping and digestive problems, depression and arthritis which are commonplace in the significantly overweight.

A recent study supported by the UW School of Medicine and Public Health and Wisconsin Partnership Program found 41.2 percent of adults and 14.8 percent of children in Wisconsin are obese. With those staggering statistics in-mind, we want to increase access to tools that stand to benefit obese patients like bariatric surgery and Wisconsin is one of just six states that does not include bariatric surgery as a covered benefit for state employees. Your vote next month could change that statistic for the better and increase access to this life-changing benefit. Doing so would be in line with local health plans that have added bariatric surgery coverage for non-state employees including Quartz which is owned in part by UW Health and has offered coverage to plan participants since last year.

Please vote to include bariatric surgery as a covered benefit for Wisconsin state employees. Thank you for your interest and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan S. Kaplan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alan S. Kaplan, MD
Chief Executive Officer, UW Health