

MEDI BRIEF

NOVEMBER 2018

The 'side effects' of HIV

December is HIV and AIDS awareness month and, while most of us know the basics about this disease, not all of us have heard of the other conditions that might occur alongside HIV. People with HIV are more likely to have other conditions as well. Diseases like diabetes, hypertension or hepatitis C might make sense, but did you know that HIV can also affect the brain?

HIV could cause neurological (brain) damage

For HIV patients, many factors can contribute to brain damage: untreated HIV and ongoing inflammation, high viral loads, low CD4 counts, AIDS-related viral and bacterial infections, living with HIV over a long period, side effects from certain older HIV medication or HIV medication that don't cross the blood-brain barrier. HIV can cause serious neurological conditions such as dementia or peripheral neuropathy. The term HAND (HIV-associated neurological disease) is used to describe the various problems related to thinking, memory and mood, and sometimes physical coordination and function.

What causes HAND?

HIV infection causes inflammation throughout the body. Even when a person is taking HIV medication, low levels of inflammation continue. This can damage different types of tissue and cells, including the immune cells that protect the nerve cells – which make up the brain, spinal cord and rest of the nervous system. When those cells are damaged, the nervous system stops working the way it should.

What are the symptoms of HAND?

With the milder forms of HAND, symptoms may go unnoticed by the person and only the most sensitive tests may be able to detect them. In people with noticeable symptoms, they can include:

- Difficulty recalling facts, memories or things that you've just read or heard
- Trouble paying attention for stretches of time
- Difficulty learning new tasks
- Feelings of sadness, hopelessness or anxiety
- Slower reflexes
- Feeling 'fuzzy headed'



These symptoms, however, could also be caused by problems other than HAND, including cardiovascular disease, infection with hepatitis C, clinical depression, anxiety, and overuse of alcohol or recreational and prescription drugs. Some medications may also cause some of these symptoms.

How is HAND diagnosed?

Most healthcare providers will try to rule out all other causes before settling on a diagnosis of HAND. If HAND is suspected, a diagnosis should be confirmed by a neurological specialist familiar with HIV, who can conduct the necessary tests.

Can HAND be prevented or treated?

While it is not clear yet if HAND can be prevented, there are many factors that can reduce the risk of it developing.

- **Control HIV:** Staying undetectable with HIV medication appears to help a great deal. Effective treatment also appears to limit milder forms of HAND. Some HIV drugs can cross the barrier between the brain/spinal cord and the bloodstream and they may help to protect the immune cells in the brain.
- **Treat all other infections** that add additional inflammation to your body, such as hepatitis B and C, and chronic kidney and liver disease. Chronic depression, anxiety and other mood disorders are all tied to greater inflammation in the brain. Get help in treating these conditions.
- Get plenty of **physical exercise** and **stay socially engaged** to keep your brain in good shape.
- **Stimulate your mind** and consider cognitive rehabilitation therapy.

Walk-In Centres Closure

The traditional Walk-In Centres, which were located at the Discovery offices in Sandton, Centurion, KwaZulu-Natal and Cape Town, have been closed. If you need to meet with a consultant face-to-face, you can contact your employer to ask about our Client Liaison Officer's (CLO) next visit to your workplace. If you are a pensioner, please call our Call Centre to help you set up a meeting with one of our CLOs at your nearest employer site, and they will gladly help with any complex matters that cannot be solved via a call or email to the Call Centre.

How we help you to reduce co-payments for medicine

Keep your cell phone on hand when you are at the pharmacy! The moment your pharmacist submits your medicine claim electronically, our real-time Medicine Management system checks if there's a cheaper alternative for you.

The Scheme introduced this process at the beginning of the year. You will receive an SMS while you stand at the pharmacy counter, informing you of a less expensive alternative generic, if available, to help you reduce or avoid a co-payment. Between January and August, nearly half of our members who received this SMS, benefitted from reduced out-of-pocket medicine costs. These members saved a total of over R230 000. This saving is

not achieved for the Scheme – these are out-of-pocket co-payments that these members would have paid. If you would also like to have the option to reduce your co-payments, please ensure that we have your current cell number on hand for you to receive the SMS.

Update your cell phone number in the member area on www.angloms.co.za, email it to member@angloms.co.za or call us on 0860 222 633. Please also provide us with your beneficiaries' cell phone numbers, as POPIA (Protection of Personal Information Act) might not allow us to send the SMS to you if the medicine is for your dependant.

Have you received your Benefit Guide?

Most members would have received their Benefit Guides in the first week of November. If your copy hasn't made it to your post box yet, please call us to ensure that we have the correct postal address. You can access the Benefit Guide in the meantime on www.angloms.co.za > Info Centre > Downloads.

FAQs: Why do you need authorisation before accessing certain benefits?

We ask you in many instances, before accessing a benefit, to call us for authorisation prior to a planned healthcare event. This could be a hospital stay, a procedure performed in a doctor's room, the purchase of medical appliances or other healthcare services.

Why do you need to get authorisation?

- To prepare us for your healthcare event so we can structure upcoming payments and manage protocols if necessary.
- To inform you about available benefits for the healthcare service you are about to purchase.
- To be able to help you understand what will and what won't be paid by the Scheme and, if necessary, to assist you in negotiating rates with your provider.
- To ensure that only clinically necessary and cost-effective services are funded.

Important facts to understand

- Authorisation does not guarantee payment of all costs that

you might incur – please speak to us to understand what part of your authorised service is funded.

- The payment of healthcare services is subject to the Scheme Rules, protocols and available benefits.
- Your authorisation has an expiry date – the healthcare service must commence within three month of authorisation.
- The availability of funds is considered at the time of enquiry – funds for the service authorised will not be 'booked' or guaranteed.
- In many cases, your healthcare provider or hospital assists you with the authorisation process, but you, the member, stay responsible for obtaining authorisation.
- In case of emergencies, please call us for authorisation on the next working day.

We have a dedicated team to assist you with your authorisation and to answer all your questions. Call the authorisation team on 0860 222 633.

Visit www.angloms.co.za to learn more about your Scheme and benefits.

Find all previous MediBrief editions in the Info Centre > MediBrief Archive.

Member Queries:

Value Care Plan: 0861 665 665, anglo@primecure.co.za

Standard and Managed Care Plan: 0860 222 633, member@angloms.co.za

Claims: claims@angloms.co.za