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the delivery room,” comments **Karen Rohan**, president at CIGNA Dental. “It is the result of planning, education, good prenatal care and good medical and dental care. We hope the program will encourage pregnant women to have an oral health exam and seek needed treatment for gum disease.”

The benefit, which is only available to group subscribers because CIGNA Dental doesn’t sell individ-

ual plans, will cost the carrier something -- but Whitehouse won’t say how much, nor what kind of utilization of the benefit enhancement the company anticipates. She points out, in fact, that “savings to employers and members would be difficult to project or measure. According to the March of Dimes, almost 500,000 babies in the United States are born prematurely, before the 37th completed week. And 11% of newborns covered by employer health plans are born too early -- that’s one in eight babies.”

That, of course, “takes a tremendous emotional and financial toll on families as premature babies fight to survive and may have ongoing health challenges throughout their lives,” she continues. “Direct costs can top \$41,610, compared to \$2,830 for a healthy, full-term birth. And care for pre-term babies typically involves longer hospital stays, more frequent doctor visits and greater use of short-term disability benefits. Premature births can

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DENTAL NEWS BITES

• **VerifPoint**, a Laguna Hills, CA-based DBA for CreDENTALS Services Inc., has received a 100% overall rating -- indeed, it also received 100% individually on all 10 elements -- for its re-certification process from the National Committee for Quality Assurance. VerifPoint calls the NCQA “one of the industry’s most prestigious and trusted healthcare quality assurance oversight organizations.” The re-certification of VerifPoint’s credentialing processes is “an intensive, rigorous and comprehensive credentialing audit of the key systems and processes that define a credentials verification organization,” the company says in a statement. This is its fifth consecutive certification by NCQA. “With leading-edge technology and dedicated professional employees, VerifPoint consistently produces outstanding results,” states Richard Ryan, president there. “It’s an honor to be recognized by NCQA as a company that produces top-quality services and professional credentials verification for our clients.” This survey has 13 attributes ranging from documented company policy and procedures to individual credentialing elements such as ongoing sanction monitoring and primary source verifications. “We are quite pleased with the evolution of our organization,” adds Jeff Densley, vice president of operations there. “After nearly a decade of enhancement to our systems and procedures, we are well established and have not received a single recommendation to better our organization from our last two NCQA audits.”

• **Wilson Health Information LLC**, an independent consumer satisfaction research company based in New Hope, PA, has announced results from its 2005 WilsonRx Health Insurance Satisfaction Survey -- and **Delta Dental** was the number one dental insurer overall and in 13 markets. They are: Baltimore, Boston, California -- in a tie with CIGNA Dental -- Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Seattle, Texas and Washington, DC. **MetLife Dental** came in first in Atlanta, Chicago and North Carolina, while **CIGNA Dental** took top honors in Los

Angeles, Miami and California. **Aetna’s** dental programs were number one in Houston, while that honor went to **Medical Mutual** in Cleveland and **HealthPartners** in Minneapolis. Plans must purchase a license to promote the award or claims and cannot reference a “win” without doing so. The survey is independently conducted. In June 2005, surveys were mailed to 43,783 households in the top 20 United States markets, representing more than 50% of the U.S. household population.

• The Phoenix-based **National Dental EDI Council’s** National Dental Electronic Transaction Simplification Workgroup has developed a dental companion guide to the 276/277 Healthcare Claim Status Response Transaction, and it’s expected that a preliminary draft will be ready for public comment prior to NDEDIC’s Annual Conference, scheduled for May 2006 in Phoenix. The NDETS workgroup began work on the 276/277 transaction set in August. NDEDIC is a non-profit organization focused on “the aggressive advancement of electronic commerce in all segments of the dental industry,” it says in a statement. It’s “the industry’s link to dental e-commerce” and is “the only organization that unites insurance carriers, software vendors, clearinghouses and dentists by creating a forum for dental EDI, and is the premier resource for the most current information available.” Specifically, the NDETS Workgroup includes participants from leading dental payers, clearinghouses, practice management vendors, practitioners and consultants. The organization has also announced the release of a companion guide created by the same workgroup that provides an interpretation of the 270/271 Healthcare Eligibility Benefit Inquiry Response transaction specifically for use by the dental industry. After “months of deliberation and finite review,” the group says, it is “proud to release the first draft of a dental-specific interpretation of the HIPAA X12 transaction sets.” The public comment period ended October 12; a final draft should be published this month. ■