

August 12, 2004

Dear members:

We are sending this letter to all members of Group Health Cooperative and our subsidiary, Group Health Options, Inc. (including Alliant and Options plan members), in case you receive care in a Group Health–operated hospital or medical center in coming weeks.

The union that represents Group Health Cooperative nurses and other staff has announced that it intends to conduct a 5-day strike at selected Group Health locations **in Western Washington** Aug. 23–27. We continue to work toward an agreement and hope to avoid a strike. But we are prepared to care for you during any labor action. Your care and well-being remain our top priority.

If you typically receive care in a Group Health–operated facility

If there's a strike, our doctors and other staff will continue to make sure you get the care you need. We apologize for any inconvenience, and we will work with you directly to make any changes as easy as possible for you.

- **All Group Health medical centers will remain open if there's a strike.** As always, if you are concerned about a medical problem, please contact your doctor. Medical centers that already offer urgent care and extended hours will continue to do so; check www.ghc.org for specific locations and hours.

If you receive care in the Puget Sound region, you can also call the Consulting Nurse toll-free at 1-800-297-6877 anytime, day and night.

The strike will **not** affect members east of the Cascades. If you receive care at Group Health–operated facilities in Spokane and North Idaho, during office hours, please call your medical center as you normally would; after hours, weekends, or holidays, please call the Consulting Nurse toll-free at 1-800-826-3620.

- **Please keep any appointments you have unless we contact you with different information.** We might have to reschedule some routine services that aren't urgent. For some services, we might use other qualified staff or arrange to provide care at other medical offices in the community. For care that we arrange outside a Group Health medical center, your standard copayment for using Group Health services will apply, and we will cover any additional costs.
- **If you have a life-threatening emergency, please call 911.** The emergency room at Group Health's Eastside Hospital in Redmond will remain open.
- **If you need surgery or hospital care or are already scheduled for surgery in one of our facilities,** we will contact you directly as we work with your doctor to make arrangements for you to get the care you need. In some instances, care might be provided at another hospital in the community, but a Group Health doctor will direct any care you receive.
- **If you are a maternity patient in Seattle,** please contact your doctor if you have general questions about your care. For urgent concerns, or if you are scheduled to deliver within two weeks, please call 206-326-3699 and our staff will advise you about your maternity care.

In all other communities, maternity services will remain unchanged.

- **The union might picket some Group Health locations.** This is not intended to keep you from getting care. Both the union and Group Health want you to get the care you need when you need it. Please keep your appointments. If you choose not to get care at a facility where there is picketing, please contact us to reschedule your appointment at another time or another Group Health medical center.

• **Important coverage reminder.** We respect that some patients may not want to cross a picket line. However, we want to be clear that benefits and coverage will be applied according to your health plan agreement. Unless you are enrolled in an Options or Alliant plan, it is important to understand that if you seek non-emergency care at a facility not owned by Group Health without Group Health authorization, we will not pay for the cost of that care. If you are an Options or Alliant member and choose care outside Group Health network, you will be responsible for additional costs as outlined in your coverage agreement.

If you usually receive care from a doctor in our community network

If your personal doctor is part of a Group Health, Alliant, or Options care network and works outside a Group Health–operated medical center, nothing will change during a strike. For example, members east of the Cascades and in Whatcom, Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties will be unaffected. If you normally receive hospital care at a community hospital that is not operated by Group Health, nothing will change.

If you have questions

Please contact Customer Service, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m., toll-free at 1-888-901-4636. For the hearing- or speech-impaired, please call the TTY/TDD Relay Service in Washington, 1-800-833-6388, or in Idaho, 1-800-377-3529.

What's behind this possible strike?

Because you might be affected, you have a right to know what the major issues are in this labor dispute. First, we want health care to stay as affordable as possible. We have asked all our staff to do what most of our patients do: Pay a small premium to help offset the cost of their own health care. Doing so helps keep premiums for everyone as low as possible.

Second, seeing your health care team should be easy to do. We proposed several ways to reduce unscheduled staff absences to help improve your health team's ability to see you when you need to see them. These issues reflect our commitment to doing the right thing not just for our valued staff, but for all our patients and their families as well.

Thank you for choosing us for your health care. We will continue to work hard for an agreement. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience, and appreciate your patience and understanding.

Sincerely,



Cheryl M. Scott
President & Chief Executive Officer



Hugh Straley, MD
Medical Director