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CONTACT:

Mike Miniati, Health Integrated
813-388-4030 or mminiati@healthintegrated.com

Reform, Integrated Healthcare Headline Health Integrated Forum

Tampa, Fla.– Sept. 25, 2009 – The key question in today’s national healthcare reform debate is how to most effectively create a system of healthcare affordability, choice and quality for all Americans. National policy thought leaders, health plan executives and healthcare experts from Health Integrated, a leading health management solutions provider, convened in Chicago Sept. 15 and 16 to debate that question and others during Health Integrated’s Fall Executive Leadership Series event, titled “Wins of Change: Winning Performance in the Age of Reform.”

With topics ranging from the rising rates of chronic illness, mental health parity, the medical home and stronger integration of medical and behavioral healthcare, participants shared perspectives on anticipated changes in healthcare policy and their impact on health plans. One keynote speaker, Julie Barnes, Deputy Director, Health Policy Program at the New America Foundation, spoke about the major goals of reform and the opportunity for the healthcare insurance industry.

“One clear priority of healthcare reform is that everyone, or nearly everyone, would have access to quality, affordable health coverage,” said Barnes. “Understanding the parameters of reform allows health plans an opportunity to create winning strategies that increase their membership, improve member health outcomes and reduce costs.”

Among the most dissected topics at the forum was the industry-wide need for a more coordinated, integrated approach for the care of patients, especially those with chronic illness, complex psychosocial issues and behavioral health challenges along with medical conditions. Chronically ill individuals with psychological challenges, including depression, and social support issues, such as lack of family support, represent a disproportionate percentage of a health plan’s cost and are particularly costly to the health system.

“In the current era of reform, health plans have the opportunity to create win-win strategies by incorporating an integrated, whole-patient approach,” said Sam Toney, MD, Chief Medical Officer and Vice Chairman, Health Integrated. “Addressing co-morbid medical and behavioral health challenges together is the most effective way to improve outcomes and quality of life for patients while reducing healthcare costs.”

Discussed at the forum, and currently being studied in various pilots across the country, the Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) may be a model that could fix many of the cracks in the healthcare system. Currently, patients move between points of care taking with them the responsibility for conveying complicated and confusing medical information. According to Dr. Toney, PCMH would allow the patient to more easily access care that is integrated, patient-centered, comprehensive and safe. Dr. Toney added that “the PCMH approach may be especially beneficial to improving the overall care of chronically ill patients, and doing so at a lower overall cost.”

Federal regulations regarding the coverage of mental health illness were also a timely topic. The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 takes effect in October 2009, and as such health plans are preparing their approaches to offering equitable coverage for mental health and addiction issues.

“For members with even the best health insurance, access to mental health services may be more challenging than access to physical health services,” said Dr. Toney. “The intent of the law is to make access easier. An integrated health management strategy will ensure that the right care is delivered at the right time at the right place, reducing the potential disconnect between primary care and mental health care.”

The event was part of Health Integrated’s ongoing Executive Leadership Series (ELS), a thought leadership program designed as a venue in which health plan executives can openly discuss issues and opportunities in their industry. For a summary of the event and to download presentations, go to www.healthintegrated.com.

Health Integrated’s next ELS event will be scheduled soon for the first half of 2010.

About Health Integrated

Health Integrated is the leading innovation partner for health plans, providing evidence-based solutions to accelerate achievement of health management goals for clinical outcomes, quality measures and cost containment. For more information, visit www.healthintegrated.com.

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