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## Managed Care *Blues*

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# Singin' the Blues over Managed Care

By Tom Kerr

**G**ot the blues over the prospective payment system? Well, maybe "Dr. Sam" should write you a musical prescription so you can let it all out.

Dr. Sam Bierstock and his Managed Care Blues Band are teaching everyone just how the health care system works—and doesn't—through the use of creative parodies such as *You Picked a Fine Time to Leave Me*, *Blue Shield* and *You're One Hip Mama 'Cause They Won't Pay for Two*.

"Our music offers a breath of fresh air for a beleaguered profession, and it's a fun way to express our frustration with the system," explained Dr. Bierstock, a former Boca Raton ophthalmologist and leader of the band. "Our song titles make the point, and it's good music. We bring out very serious issues, like confidentiality of medical records," which is addressed in *Checkin' on My Records (Everybody's Had a Look)*.

Dr. Bierstock, who spent 15 years in ophthalmology, also holds a degree in electrical engineering. When a shoulder injury prevented him from ever performing eye surgery again, he decided to work as an engineering consultant for other doctors. Visiting their offices, he empathized with the staff and patients who complained about the confusion and limitations of managed care.

"I discovered two things about managed care," Dr. Bierstock said. "Physicians feel that they are losing their autonomy when it comes to decision-making and their own practice, and the patients don't understand how managed care works."

He decided to develop educational services to help people who were lost in the managed care shuffle.

"I love blues music," he recounted. "When I travel, I always find the blues bars and join in with the musicians. So I decided that instead of doing serious lectures, I would do it with music, mixing fun and humor but at the same time addressing serious issues."

His imagination led him to develop a "managed music" theme—applying the same principles used in managed health care to the music industry.

"Anyone who is sick of paying high prices for music will love managed music,"



he laughed. "I tell people to just send me \$100 per month, and I'll provide all of the music they want. Of course, I decide the types of music played and how much they really need; but I don't tell members that until after they have subscribed."

Dr. Bierstock's original band members were other doctors. However, when they were unable to fit their gigs into their busy schedules, he hired professional musicians to join the band.

That's not the story Dr. Sam tells his fans though.

"Doctors are too expensive," he says, "so I fired all the doctors and replaced them with professional musicians. As soon as we have more people signed up for managed music, I plan to replace the current members of the band with music students."

Actually, making good music was a key aspect in making his idea work, he said.

"People love the lyrics, but they also love the music," he said. "I maintain a panel of what we call 'preferred music providers' and members in our plan can select the ones they want, which is usually the same six guys. If members want musicians outside the plan, it comes out of their own pockets."

The band has produced a CD titled *Minimal Service*, which offers such hits as *Move on Down the List* and *Baby, Don't You*

*Wanna Go Home?* The latter is a tribute to one day postpartum stays.

Other titles include *Sorry, Man, But Your Bypass Is Considered Cosmetic* and *If You Won't Refuse Treatment, We'll Find Someone Who Will*. The group has played in 35 states and received inquiries from as far away as Grenada.

Everyone who is fed up with managed care is eating up the concept of managed music. A U.S. congressman liked the CD so much he ordered more than 535 copies to give to each member of Congress. Dr. Bierstock also has received compliments from the president and vice president.

"Because he plays the sax, I invited President Clinton to join our band after his term expires," said Dr. Bierstock.

He's not out to bash HMOs, he claims. In fact, some agencies, such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield, have hired him to perform at their conferences.

"The insurance companies see our music as a lighthearted look at their business," Dr. Bierstock said. "They are very well aware of the public's perception, and they are devoting a lot of time and money to cleaning up their images. They have to change their practices for the better."

He plays the managed music theme to the hilt, saying he doesn't want people to like his music too much for fear they will request more services from him than he's willing to provide.

"My real target market is people who hate music and never want to listen to it," he said. "HMOs and insurance companies make a fortune when everyone is well and no one gets sick. In the same way, I want people who pay for the music but never listen to it."

The band tries not to write its own music.

"We just alter the lyrics because we don't want to go through the expense of devoting time for the development of new songs," Dr. Sam explained. "Our theory is, If we have old tunes that will work, why not use them?"

More information on the Managed Care Blues Band is available online at [www.managedmusic.com](http://www.managedmusic.com). ■

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