



Swine flu causes insurance backlog, providers confirm

Story by: David Pawsey | Magazine: [FinancialAdviser](#) | Published Thursday , August 06, 2009

GPs have warned insurers swine flu could result in months of delays in their reports coming through leading to clients being forced to wait for vital protection cover.

Aegon and Bupa confirmed they have already seen evidence of administrative backlogs as GPs struggled to deal with the pandemic.

While this was not yet a widespread issue, Matt Rann, group head of underwriting and claims for Aegon UK, said it could grow if instances of swine flu escalated, which could in turn delay clients getting on risk.

He said: "Our need for GP evidence varies on a case-by-case basis, from routine non-medical limits to obtaining information about a customer's disclosures.

"If there is evidence of lengthy delays in obtaining a GPR, where possible other methods of underwriting, such as tele-interviewing and medical e

"However there will be circumstances where we will have no choice but to rely on information from the GP."

Stephen Casey, product development and marketing for individual protection, said he was aware of one case where the GP practice had said it would not issue any reports for at least three months due to its increased work load.

He said: "On individual cases we will try and underwrite if possible with medical information. I think the problem is potentially short lived given the government have a GP helpline.

"But we are aware of the problem and are formulating an email to all intermediaries telling them that we have come across this and are doing our best to smooth things along."

Other providers said they had minimal reliance on GP reports and had not had any issues.

However some seemed less prepared than others if there were delays in receiving medical information.

Joe Wiggins, protection PR manager for Legal & General, said: "It has not really affected us yet but we are trying to rely less and less on GP reports anyway. We use nurse screenings much more because they are a lot quicker.



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"That is our ongoing philosophy swine flu or no swine flu."

Michael Whyte, chief underwriter of Aviva, said: "We are not seeing any issues at the moment but obviously it seems perfectly reasonable if it escalates we will begin to see some issues. We will be monitoring this but we aim to keep GP reports to an absolute minimum as a natural course of business."

Denis Bayle, protection product manager for Friends Provident, said the provider had not had any problems so far and expected the government helpline and website to minimise any issues. As a result the provider did not have any special measures in place.

He said: "If were having any issues then we would have to look at it afresh."

Axa was another firm that had not yet experienced any delays. However Iain Mallon, director of protection marketing for Axa, said: "We are now looking into the implications of the pandemic and will be formulating a plan in the near future."

Roger Edwards, proposition director of Bright Grey, said the provider had minimised the use of GP reports through online processing and tele-underwriting.

He said: "If there was a short term problem where GPs were struggling we would look at if we could do a decision in principle or something like that but we have not got to the stage where need to take any measures such as that."

Peter Hamilton, protection development director for Zurich UK Life, said it had not yet seen any problems but was "actively monitoring" the situation. Mr Hamilton said Zurich had already done a lot to minimise the need for GPRs but said if there were any problems then it would use private companies for medical screening.

Mr Hamilton said there would always be some cases that required a report. He said: "In those cases we will do whatever we can to speed up the process."

Peter Chadborn, principal for Colchester-based IFA CBK, said: "GPs are notoriously slow in returning requests and the swine flu pandemic is only going to make this worse"

"It is all the reason to embrace tele-underwriting as this dramatically reduces the need for GP reports."

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