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UnitedHealth Aims to Restore Change Healthcare Systems Within Two Weeks

Testing of medical claims systems will begin on March 18, parent company says

By James Rundle

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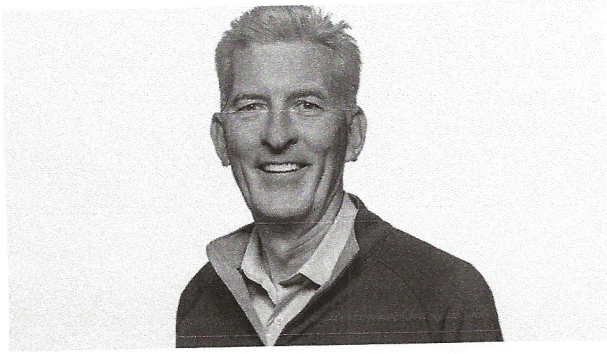


"We're strongly recommending that all of our provider and payer clients continue to work on the workarounds," says Dirk McMahon, president and chief operating officer of UnitedHealth Group. PHOTO: PATRICK SISON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

UnitedHealth Group said it plans to test connections to its Change Healthcare's medical claims software and network starting Monday, March 18, and restore service through the week.

Change Healthcare, which UnitedHealth owns through its Optum subsidiary, was forced to disconnect more than 100 services after a ransomware attack that began Feb. 21. Change Healthcare operates the largest clearinghouse for insurance billing and payments in the U.S., and the outage has wreaked havoc among

hospitals, pharmacies and medical groups, many of which have gone without revenue since the attack.



Dirk McMahon, president and chief operating officer of UnitedHealth Group PHOTO: UNITEDHEALTH GROUP

The insurance giant said pharmacy claims and payment systems are back up and running as of Thursday and its electronic payments platform will be available from March 15.

“We’re strongly recommending that all of our provider and payer clients continue to work on the workarounds,” Dirk McMahon, president and chief operating officer

of UnitedHealth, said in his first interview since the attack.

“They’re good to have in place,” said McMahon, who is leading the company’s response to the attack. “We want to get the system moving faster, number one, and number two, they’re important in the interest of redundancy in the current environment.”

UnitedHealth said it would expand stopgap funding for its providers. This additional program, which is separate from an Optum loan program launched on Feb. 29, will apply to United Healthcare’s medical, dental and vision providers.

“We’re urging other payers to do the same thing. The payers have the best view of the providers that have been impacted,” McMahon said.

The loan program has received a mixed reception from smaller medical groups. Some have said the amounts offered fell far short of what they needed to stay in business.

Optum will also provide funding through loans to providers who can’t