



How Blue Shield of California Saved Over \$2000 Per Patient With Guided Meditation

Blue Shield of California is a \$17 billion nonprofit managed care company that provides health, dental, vision, Medicaid, and Medicare service plans to 4 million members throughout California. Despite high financial strength ratings, it still faced the challenge of balancing the need to control costs with the need to deliver positive experiences and high quality of care to attract and retain members. Thanks to a groundbreaking partnership with Health Journeys, which provided guided imagery audios to members scheduled for major surgery, Blue Shield was able to both significantly reduce costs and dramatically increase patient satisfaction.

Roughly three weeks in advance of their scheduled surgeries, a nurse health coach contacted qualifying members to give them the option of receiving a guided imagery audio designed to reduce both anxiety before surgery and pain afterwards. Interested patients received the audio, instructions, and access to the nurse for questions about the audio, surgery, or recovery process.

The audio was a 20-minute guided meditation by Health Journeys' own Belleruth Naparstek, scored to soothing music, that led listeners to a favorite peaceful location, inviting them to imagine their upcoming surgery in a detached way, as capable O.R. staff performed their work smoothly and well, the space filled with protective, approving well-wishers from their lives watching over the process. The meditation also suggested positive results like minimal bleeding, comfortable post-op awakening, reduced need for pain meds and a smooth, uncomplicated recovery.

In a year-long study, Blue Shield found that:

- The percentage of patients who reported "high" or "very high" pre-op anxiety dropped from 47% before listening to the Health Journeys audio to 1.6% after listening
- 57% of patients who listened to the audio before surgery reported experiencing less pain than expected
- 84% of patients who used guided imagery said they would use it again in the future
- 85% of patients who used guided imagery said they would recommend it to a friend
- On average, patients who listened to the guided imagery had 4.5% lower total hospital costs, 8.4% lower hospital pharmacy costs, and 8% shorter length of stay



Blue Shield spent \$18 and achieved an average cost savings of \$2003 for each participating patient, compared to patients who had an identical surgery but did not listen to the Health Journeys audio.

In addition, significantly more (74%) members opted for the guided imagery than any other Blue Shield patient-centered health education program, a percentage more than double that of the next leading program among members (arthritis, at 36%). Deborah Schwab, R.N., M.S., Blue Shield's director of New Product Development, believed that was because it was easy to use, took just a few minutes a day, and delivered meaningful results in just a few weeks.

Finally, Blue Cross received hundreds of unsolicited and unexpected thank you notes from members about the program — a compelling enough contrast that Blue Shield quickly pivoted from providing guided imagery only for surgery to offering a wide range of Health Journeys audios for 20 other health challenges.

“Our members want tools like guided imagery that help ease the anxiety they feel during vulnerable moments such as surgery,” Schwab said. “The fact that guided imagery actually saves money is a wonderful bonus.”

Let Us Customize a Cost-Effective, Evidence-Based
Meditation Program that Targets Your Organization's
Unique Needs

Schedule a time for your personalized walk-through
& get your questions answered.