

Institute for Disability Studies
ShareCare Notes
March 20, 2006
Medicare Information and Current Events

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1. Medicare Scam Alert

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) warns seniors and people with disabilities to be aware of a scheme that asks Medicare beneficiaries for money and checking account information to help them enroll in a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan.

This scheme is called the "\$299 Ring" for the typical amount of money Medicare beneficiaries are talked into withdrawing from their checking accounts to pay for a non-existent prescription drug plan. Consumers can report these cases to their local law enforcement agencies or 1-877-7SAFERX (1-877-772-3379).

Medicare has received complaints from Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Georgia. Complaints have been made against a number of different companies, but authorities believe that the companies are the same and are typically based outside the U.S. As soon as CMS receives these complaints, they are investigated and referred to federal law enforcement authorities.

No Medicare drug plan can ask a person with Medicare for bank account or other personal information over the telephone. No beneficiary should ever provide that kind of information to a caller. They should contact their local police department if they believe someone is trying to take money or information from them illegally.

People with Medicare should also remember that they should be on the look out for anyone trying to take advantage of them and take steps to protect themselves by remembering:

- * No one can come into your home uninvited.
- * No one can ask you for personal information during their marketing activities.
- * Always keep all personal information, such as your Medicare number, safe, just as you would a credit card or a bank account number.
- * Whenever you have a question or concern about any activity regarding Medicare, call 1-800-MEDICARE.

In addition, legitimate Medicare drug plans will not ask for payment over the telephone or the Internet. They must bill the beneficiary for the monthly premium. Typically, that amount is set up as an automatic withdrawal from the beneficiary's monthly Social Security check. Beneficiaries may also opt to pay the monthly premiums in other ways such as writing a check or setting up automatic payments from their checking accounts.

2. Medicare Hurricane Katrina Evacuee Information

CMS will grant all Hurricane Katrina evacuees a special enrollment period

(SEP) that gives them more time to change their Medicare prescription drug plans in 2006. Individuals will be considered "evacuees" and eligible for this SEP if they reside in certain zip codes as identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency at the time of the hurricane (August 2005). Please refer to the attached spreadsheet of designated zip codes. The special enrollment period means that Katrina evacuees will be able to switch plans, including Medicare prescription drug plans, at any time through Dec. 31, 2006. This special enrollment period allows Katrina evacuees to change regardless of a change in residence, such as if they have temporarily located, have moved back to their permanent home, or if there are other circumstances that require more time to choose or change plans. To determine if an individual is eligible for this SEP, Medicare plans must first attempt to obtain proof that the individual resided in an affected zip code (e.g., driver's license, utility bills, etc.). If the individual is unable to provide such proof, the plan must accept the beneficiary's attestation that he or she resided in an affected zip code.

Table and article is located at:

www.aapd.com/News/medicaredrugcoverage/CMSdrugcovKatrina.htm

3. ShareCare Bank Update

Several new members have joined in March and we are awaiting applications from others to join. We are hoping to reach our March goal of 30 members. We have had lots of exchanges, including yard work, driving to a doctor's appointment, and several other helpful services. Peggy Speed has earned the most Time Dollars this month. But we still have more time left in March for others to earn more Time Dollars. This is a very exciting time for ShareCare Bank. If you are not a member of the bank, you should seriously consider joining. Our potluck suppers are great and we have many more fun events in the works. The members are having a good time both giving and receiving. We need members who can cook/bake, those who can provide transportation and many other talents that you may possess. In the coming weeks, we will be organizing a couple of yard work events so that we can help a few of our members who still need clean up from the storm. For more information and to download the application, please check out the Web site at www.usm.edu/sharecare.

4. Upcoming Events

On Wednesday, March 22, 2006 we will hold our ShareCare Caregiver Support Group at 10 a.m. at Westminster Presbyterian Church. It is open to anyone. The next Forrest General Support Group will be at the hospital in the Elm Room on April 13, 2006 at 6 p.m.

Project ShareCare, funded by the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Area Agency on Aging, provides counseling and

networking for family caregivers of adults with disabilities and seniors.

ShareCare is sponsored by the Institute for Disability Studies (IDS), Mississippi's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). IDS provides university training, community service activities, research, and information that promote the independence, productivity, and community inclusion of individuals with disabilities and their families. For more information about IDS, visit the Institute's Web site at www.usm.edu/ids or call 1-888-671-0051 (TTY). To make a tax-deductible gift to IDS for this and other projects, visit <http://www.usm.edu/ids/supportus.html>.

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