



Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.

HOUSING & COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT OFFICE ON AGING

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YOU CAN HELP STOP MEDICARE FRAUD

By Maxine Marcus, MPH

Information Source: CalMedicare.org

In this election year, Medicare costs and provisions are constantly being discussed and dissected in the news. What is rarely discussed is what Medicare recipients can do to protect Medicare assets for themselves and seniors to come. You can do this by helping the government to avoid the billions of dollars scammed by criminals who bill Medicare for services and supplies that patients don't need and often don't receive. Here are some ways you can help.

Protect your Medicare card number. Your Medicare card is your health credit card. Protect and guard its use just as you would any credit card. People may try to get your number by calling you and offering you free services, exams, health appliances, or medications in exchange for your Medicare card number. They then can skim thousands of dollars from Medicare funds, that otherwise could help pay for more services and better coverage for you and other seniors.

You can help stop this fraud by never giving your Medicare number to anyone over the phone or in person unless YOU initiated the contact and you know to whom you are speaking. Also, don't accept any "free" services or supplies, don't accept a small amount of money (bribe) to be medically screened (tested), and don't accept "free" food or housekeeping services that require you giving your Medicare number.

Examine your bills and statements.

Even if you do not knowingly give out your Medicare number, scammers can sometimes buy it from unscrupulous health care providers and their staff. That is why it is important that you carefully examine the Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) you get from Medicare when claims are paid for your care. Ask yourself: Did I get the services listed? Did my doctor order these services? Are the dates of these services correct? Are the dollar amounts the same as on my bill?

Report suspected fraud or abuse.

Fraud is an intentional deception or misrepresentation that someone makes, knowing it is false. Abuse involves actions that are inconsistent with sound medical business or fiscal practices. Both fraud and abuse steal valuable resources from the Medicare Trust Fund that would otherwise be used to provide benefits to Medicare beneficiaries. In either case, the government cannot correct the abuse or punish the defrauder unless someone reports the unwarranted billing.

To report, you should first call the provider listed on the MSN, and inquire about the item you're questioning. (If you need more information about the item, call the 800 number listed on the bottom of the MSN). In many cases, there has been a billing error which your health care provider can easily correct.

If, after speaking to the health care provider, you think the charges were fraudulent, contact a Senior Counselors against Medicare Swindlers (SCAMS) counselor at your local HICAP office -- (714) 560-0424. The counselor will help you take the steps to end the scam for good and protect the Medicare Trust Fund from future thefts.

For information and assistance for older adults, the disabled, or their caregivers, call:

County of Orange Office on Aging 1-800-510-2020.