

## Medicare Education Efforts

In an effort to keep the National Aging Services Network, consumers, and others informed about issues that affect Medicare beneficiaries, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA) is providing you with information about efforts underway by the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). CMS is working to help Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers become more active participants in their health care decisions. AoA supports these efforts and looks forward to continued collaborations with CMS to better provide services to older Americans

In an effort to help seniors and disabled Americans who rely on Medicare, CMS has expanded and enhanced its resources to provide more detailed information to help them make more informed choices about their health plan options.

### **National Advertising Campaign**

CMS has launched an enhanced education and multi-media advertising campaign to enable each beneficiary to make informed decisions about important health care matters, and to be an active participant in his or her own health care. It includes general market network television and print, Spanish language television and radio, and Internet advertising. The annual education effort highlights important coverage options, including Medicare+Choice plans and the preferred provider organizations

available in 23 states, and Medicare's improved information resources.

### **The Medicare Toll-Free Telephone Line**

CMS has enhanced 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) to serve beneficiaries 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Over 600 new customer service representatives have been added to ensure that callers get all of their questions answered, including questions about health plans in their area. The telephone line also provides pre-recorded information which can help callers request information about health plans in their area, copies of the Medicare & You handbook in English or Spanish or answers to the most frequently asked questions. The service accommodates both English and Spanish-speaking callers and offers a TTY line (telecommunications device for the speech and hearing impaired): 1-877-486-2048.

### **The Medicare Internet Site**

CMS maintains a Web site of information for beneficiaries and other interested individuals: [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov). The site has won awards for clarity, accessibility, and ease of use including a Platinum Award for Best Overall Internet Site in a competition among both private and government Web sites. Launched in 1998, [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) averages 6 million page views each month. The site contains 12 interactive databases, the Medicare & You handbook, lists of resources for beneficiaries and people

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## FACT SHEET

### *Medicare Education...cont'd.*

who work with beneficiaries, and general information about Medicare.

### **The Medicare Personal Plan Finder**

The Medicare Personal Plan Finder, helps people with Medicare make more informed choices about all their health plan options. It walks beneficiaries through a series of questions to help them make choices about the various health plan choices that are available to them in their communities. Based on answers to a series of confidential questions, the tool generates a personalized report on the benefits and services offered by area health plans. In July 2002, the Medicare Personal Plan Finder was enhanced with a new tool that enables Medicare beneficiaries to estimate their monthly out-of-pocket costs for available health plans.

### **Other [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) Information Databases:**

The Web site also hosts 12 separate databases to help individuals, including Nursing Home Compare, Dialysis Facility Compare, Your Medicare Coverage, which all contain detailed comparisons about facilities and choices available county-by-county and information on health care benefits in the Original Medicare program. Other information databases include a list of Medicare participating physicians, Medicare suppliers, information about available prescription drug assistance programs and frequently asked questions to help people find answers they need.

**Nursing Home Compare** contains detailed quality information about individual nursing homes across the

country, the average number of nursing staff hours available per resident per day; nursing home inspection results including whether any deficiencies were found and how severe they were, and characteristics of the nursing home including the number of beds, type of ownership, and whether or not the nursing home participates in Medicare, Medicaid or both.

CMS released new quality data that gives seniors and their families more comparative information about local nursing homes' quality of care. The HHS Nursing Home Quality Initiative (NHQI) is designed to further improve the quality of care received by the 2.9 million Americans who live in nursing homes nationwide. The data will include ten measures of nursing home quality that were recommended by a committee of the National Quality Forum, an independent standard-setting organization representing public and private purchasers, consumers, providers and researchers. The measures are designed to allow consumers and nursing homes to make an "apples-to-apples" comparison. The data have been risk adjusted to take into account differences in certain health care needs of individual residents, allowing for a fairer comparison of nursing home performance. The measures indicate actions that nursing homes can take to improve care.

AoA partnered with CMS on the NHQI. Under the initiative, CMS and AoA worked with long term care ombudsmen who will use the new data, along with other information and personal visits, to assist families in making informed decisions about placement in nursing homes.

The ombudsmen help nursing home residents and their families on a daily basis and are trained and funded through AoA.

In addition to the NHQI, CMS has recently announced a new Home Health Quality Initiative to help people who rely on Medicare and Medicaid programs and their family members find the best home health agency for their needs. CMS will begin the first phase of the initiative this spring with eight states – Florida, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Mexico, Oregon, South Carolina, Wisconsin and West Virginia. CMS will begin publishing the quality information about home health agencies in these eight states to help make people aware of how performance differs across agencies and to help stimulate home health agency quality improvement.

**Dialysis Compare** provides detailed information about Medicare-certified dialysis centers across the country. The information helps people with Medicare compare facility characteristics and quality measures.

**Your Medicare Coverage** provides information about health care benefits in the Original Medicare plan. The database includes some of the services and supplies

the Original Medicare covers and does not currently cover; the conditions that must be met for some services or supplies to be covered; how often services or supplies are covered; how much beneficiaries pay; and contacts for beneficiaries if they have additional questions.

### **Prescription Drug Assistance**

**Programs** are compiled in the most extensive, nationally complete list anywhere. Beneficiaries can check the programs that offer free or discounted rates for medicines and the qualifications necessary to take advantage of those programs. A list of contact names and phone numbers is supplied, along with contact information to help fill out applications.

**Frequently Asked Questions** search tool allows users to search by category or phrase to find answers to their questions. Visitors can provide feedback by using a rating scale on how satisfied they were with the answer. If visitors are unable to find answers, they can submit a question to CMS. Prior to submitting a question, the tool uses a knowledge base to provide customers with suggested answers to their questions.

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging (AoA), works with a nationwide network of organizations and service providers to make support services and resources available to older persons and their caregivers. For more information about the AoA, please contact: **the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging**, Washington, DC 20201, Phone 202-619-0724, e-mail [aoainfo@aoa.gov](mailto:aoainfo@aoa.gov), Web site: [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)

