

Remarks of  
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Assistant Secretary for Aging  
Administration on Aging

To the

Pasco-Pinellas Area Agency on Aging Board of Directors

February 25, 2005  
Dunedin Senior Center  
Dunedin, Florida

This text is the basis of the oral remarks of the Assistant Secretary for Aging. It should be used with the understanding that some material may be added or omitted.

Date: February 25, 2005, 11:30 AM

Location: Dunedin Senior Center  
300 Douglas Avenue  
Dunedin, FL

Sponsor: Area Agency on Aging Pasco-Pinellas

Length: 20 Minutes

Goal/Purpose: Keynote Speaker at 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Luncheon Meeting

Audience: AAA Board member, advisory council, staff,  
volunteers, providers and other supporters of the  
AAA

Acknowledgements: Sally Gronda, Executive Director; Board

Qs & A's: None

## Introductory Remarks

- Good afternoon! It's a pleasure to be with you at your 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Luncheon Meeting.
  
- Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge:
  - Sally Gronda and the Board for inviting me to speak today;
  - Costas Miskis, our new Regional Administrator;
  - Today's award recipients.
  
- Today I want to talk about three of the ways this organization is playing a key role in helping our community service providers meet the challenges of the future.

## **Medicare**

- Let me begin with Medicare outreach, which is becoming a critical activity for community providers.
- In 2004, the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) gave Medicare beneficiaries the opportunity to reduce their out-of-pocket drug costs by enrolling in a Medicare-approved prescription drug discount card, and if they were low-income, it gave them the ability to receive a \$600 credit toward their drug costs.
- In 2005, beneficiaries became eligible to receive preventive services like diabetes and cardiovascular screenings.
- In 2006, beneficiaries will be able to select a prescription drug benefit plan, giving them access to full Medicare prescription drug coverage for the first time ever.

- Although the large number of benefit choices makes community outreach challenging, it also creates an opportunity for community providers to demonstrate that our experience is valuable in identifying the best ways to help our clients take full advantage of these benefits.
- I know you are doing your part. I am so pleased that the Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas joined AoA and CMS in our efforts in 2004 and in 2005 to reach beneficiaries who would most benefit from the drug card Transitional Assistance. I particularly like your display “You Got Questions, We Got Answers” that you have set up in locations where seniors shop, like Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club.
- Keep up the good work because, as you know, it is not too late to sign Medicare beneficiaries up for Transitional Assistance!

- Currently, there are over 40 million Medicare beneficiaries nationally, including 2.9 million beneficiaries in Florida. Of those in Florida, almost 800,000 beneficiaries do not have any prescription drug coverage.
- CMS expects that a total of 7 million Medicare beneficiaries, including 539,000 beneficiaries in Florida, are eligible to participate in the Transitional Assistance Program.
- By making sure that beneficiaries are able to access this assistance, you are providing critical health coverage and saving them money. This also translates into potential savings of \$647 million for the state of Florida.

- We have learned through the drug card and transitional assistance experience that seniors really need one-on-one personalized counseling when making decisions about their health care.
- We also know that beneficiaries have a lot of choices to make in the coming year. Our job is to make sure that beneficiaries have the resources they need to make the best choice, both now, and in 2006 when the full drug benefit goes into affect. We hope to build on the lessons learned from our current outreach efforts as we prepare for full implementation.

## **Aging and Disability Resource Center Initiative**

- Next, I'd like to highlight a project dear to my heart: the Aging and Disability Resource Center Program, which was designed to help states develop a single, coordinated system of information and access for all persons seeking long term support. We are serving as the front-end entry point for the entire system of long term care.
- I am pleased that the Pasco-Pinellas AAA has been chosen as one of the three pilot sites in Florida!
- Florida is also the first grantee to take the lead in establishing the ADRC legislatively. The legislation (SB 1226) mandates the expansion of the initiative to include the transition to Aging Resource Centers for area agencies on aging in all parts of the state, which will specifically focus on Florida seniors.

## **Innovative Approaches to Care Management**

- Lastly, our network is taking the lead in developing excellent models of coordinated and integrated health and social supports that have improved access to community-based options for older Americans.
- As this approach to providing care continues to evolve, we must look at strategic opportunities for the aging services network in this arena.
- I recently awarded 14 grants to Area agencies on aging and community organizations to support partnerships with managed care organizations and/or capitated financing arrangements that improve the quality of care in older people. I am proud that one of those was to the Gulf Coast Jewish Family Services, Inc. which will be working with CARES, Inc., Suncoast Center for Community Mental Health & Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas for the Pasco-Pinellas Long-Term Care Partnership. I had the pleasure of spending some time with Michael Bernstein and his staff this morning, and was so impressed with the work they are doing.

## **Conclusion**

- These new initiatives are so important to ensuring that our community providers continue to provide the very best services to our clients.
- The models that you are testing for community outreach, for streamlined access to services, and for integrated care management are laying the groundwork for major innovations in home and community-based care.
- These activities have the potential to revolutionize the way we provide services to our clients. The partnerships we are building are breaking down institutional barriers and creating seamless systems of care, so that clients have access to a coordinated set of long-term supports, no matter who pays for them.

- You have all heard me talk about my vision of long-term care for the future. We are moving ahead with a new agenda—long-term living-- for a new generation of seniors and caregivers.
- This agenda emphasizes the consumer: better long-term care options, more consumer-friendly systems, and maximum flexibility in developing those systems.
- The seniors of the future will be informed consumers. Our challenge is to help them make the best decisions possible to take full advantage of the benefits and opportunities available to them.
- I look forward to this challenge, and am excited about the important role that you are playing in making it happen.