



Ruth Brock
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News Release

Medicare Fraud

They go door-to-door looking for seniors who may need a motorized scooter. They even offer to give them the scooter absolutely free. Those who accept the offer are then asked for their Medicare or Medicaid number. They then bill Medicare or Medicaid for a motorized wheelchair. What is the difference? A scooter can cost \$1,800; a motorized wheelchair can run as much as \$5,000. This practice seems to run rampant throughout much of the United States, particularly in areas catering to seniors.

"It is a popular Medicare/Medicaid fraud that costs the government millions of dollars," according to Charles Clarkson, an attorney and Coordinator of the NJ Healthcare Advocate Volunteer Effort. "Once seniors unwittingly give out their Medicare or Medicaid number, insurance crooks are off to the races."

"Medicare and Medicaid fraud is a huge problem that the federal government hopes to tackle by teaching Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries how to avoid becoming victims of fraud, waste, and abuse," said Mr. Clarkson. "Everyone has a stake in this because money lost to these practices has an impact on premiums and deductibles and could result in cutbacks to these programs."

Here are some tips to avoid becoming a victim of Medicare fraud:

- Always read your Medicare Summary Notice, stamped "This is Not a Bill", that comes in after you receive medical care. Look for three things in particular: charges for services you did not receive, billing for the same service twice, and services that were not ordered by your doctor.
- Keep track of your medical services by maintaining a personal health care journal.
- Then, when you get your Medicare Summary Notice, you can compare the two to determine if you received the services that Medicare is billing.
- Do not give out your Medicare or Medicaid information in person or over the phone until you are sure you can trust the person with whom you are talking. Treat your Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security number as carefully as your bank accounts and credit cards.
- Shut the door on anyone claiming to represent Medicare or Medicaid. They will never come to your door uninvited. Remember, too, that Medicare and Medicaid do not sell or endorse any product or service.

- Shred your Medicare or other health care papers before throwing them away. Crooks go through the trash looking for Social Security numbers and other sensitive data.
- If someone offers to buy your Medicare or Medicaid number, do not sell it. It is not for sale.
- If you suspect an error or fraud related to health care, gather the facts and report it.
- Follow your instincts. If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

For more information on this or related topics, contact Ruth Brock, Regional Extension Agent for Consumer Science and Personal Financial Management. You can reach her at the St. Clair County office at (205) 338-9416 or email at brockru@auburn.edu.

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Source: Rutgers Cooperative Extension