

FraudAlert!

Helping keep the promise.



September 2011 • Volume 15, No. 2

• Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups Elder Law Center

From the Project Director. Elizabeth Conrad

Let's Get Acquainted

By Judy Steinke, Wisconsin SMP Volunteer Coordinator

This month our featured volunteer is Roberta Mosentine of Barron. Many of you probably know her by her nickname of Punky, which has stuck with her since her father dubbed her his "Little Punken" when she was two years old. Everyone calls her Punky, and she said that she knows she is in trouble when her husband of 50 years calls her Roberta.

Punky is the Chair of CWAG's District 6, and she and her husband, Ken, have been active in CWAG since the director of the Barron County Office on Aging told them about the organization over 15 years ago. As the Chair of District 6, which covers nine counties, she coordinates and leads all meetings in the district. In addition to these duties, she willingly shares SMP information at any health fairs, senior expos, and meetings that she attends. Punky is also a graduate of CWAG's Senior Statesmanship class.

In addition to volunteering for CWAG, she was the first woman to serve on the Barron City Council where she served for over 20 years. She served the council as president and also co-chaired the city's Sesquicentennial celebration. Punky also volunteers at her church and for the county's home delivered meal program.

Punky, a graduate of the St. Francis School of Nursing, was employed for over 45 years utilizing her nursing skills in a hospital, a nursing home, and a clinic. This experience has made her a strong advocate for Wisconsin seniors.

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Published and distributed by the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups Elder Law Center funded in part by grant #90MP0016 from the Administration on Aging, Department of Health and Human Services. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration on Aging Policy.

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Let's Get Acquainted *continued*

For fun, Punky enjoys getting together and playing bridge with a club that she helped establish in 1963. Not only do they play bridge, but they also have a meal and share a laugh or two. Being the advocate that she is, Punky probably shares CWAG and SMP information with this group too!

Punky, thank you for all that you do for CWAG and Wisconsin SMP. Thanks, too, to the Barron County Office on Aging for pointing you in our direction!

Wisconsin SMP Capacity Building Grant Accomplishments

By Kevin Brown, Wisconsin SMP Capacity Building Grant Manager/Trainer

On September 30, 2010, the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups was awarded a one-year grant to expand the capacity of its Wisconsin SMP (Senior Medicare Patrol) program. As we approach the final days of the grant period, I am very pleased to report that Wisconsin SMP has made significant progress in our efforts to empower more seniors to prevent healthcare fraud in our state.

One of our most important accomplishments has been recruiting and training over three dozen new volunteers for our program. I have conducted seven Wisconsin SMP Volunteer Trainings in the first nine months of 2011. Fifty volunteers and professionals, including 38 new volunteers, three existing volunteers, and nine professional partners, attended the seven sessions. Our new volunteers and professional partners have greatly expanded our outreach efforts by doing twelve group presentations and distributing our materials at eight community events. Many of our other new volunteers will help us educate Medicare beneficiaries, caregivers, and professionals on how to prevent, detect, and report healthcare fraud, waste, and abuse at some of the upcoming events listed elsewhere in this newsletter.

Wisconsin SMP has also increased its media outreach efforts substantially over the past year. The news releases we prepared and distributed to promote our volunteer training sessions generated press coverage in a number of newspapers across the state, including the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, *Herald Times Reporter*, *Ladysmith News*, and *The Phillips Bee*. Thousands of Wisconsinites (and Michiganders) received our message of fraud prevention when I was interviewed live on two radio stations: WCUB/WLTU in Manitowoc and WFAW in Fort Atkinson. Finally, WJFW-TV aired a news story earlier this month to publicize the upcoming Wisconsin SMP Volunteer Training session that will be held at the Kalmar Senior Community Center in Eagle River on October 5.

Another major accomplishment of the past twelve months has been the development and production of six new audio podcasts. These podcasts, which have been posted on our website, have expanded our efforts to increase awareness of the Wisconsin SMP project, educate beneficiaries and others about healthcare fraud, enlarge our pool of volunteers, and reach out to non-English speaking beneficiaries in the state.

All of the podcasts are three to five minutes long and were recorded in English, Spanish, and Hmong. We also produced promotional messages (15 or 30 seconds in length) in all three languages to publicize the release of each podcast. The English language spots aired once or twice a day on 74 radio stations across the state during the week the podcast was posted. The Spanish language spots aired on Hispanic radio stations in Madison and Milwaukee, and the promotional spots recorded in Hmong were run on stations in three areas of Wisconsin that have large Hmong populations: Green Bay, Sheboygan, and Sister Bay.

Wisconsin SMP was recognized for all of these accomplishments when we were presented an “Innovation in Program Capacity Building and Outreach Award” at the 2011 SMP National Conference in August. Thank you, SMP staff and volunteers, for all your hard work over the past year. Together we are making a difference in the fight against health care fraud, waste, and abuse in Wisconsin.

New AoA Guidelines Designed to Improve Professionalism of SMP Programs

The Medicare program’s annual loss of approximately \$70 billion dollars to fraud, errors, and abuse is a major concern of the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA), which funds the 55 Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) programs that provide outreach and assistance to beneficiaries across the nation.

Over the course of the next three years, the professionalism of all SMP programs will be raised to the next level. AoA has contracted with Linda Graff & Associates to create the SMP Volunteer Risk and Program Management Policies. Currently, all potential new Wisconsin SMP volunteers are subject to a Criminal Background check and required to complete the SMP Volunteer Foundations training. Future requirements will also include the signing of a Volunteer Agreement and a Confidentiality Agreement. Oftentimes, the Medicare beneficiaries that we serve are extremely vulnerable, and it is our responsibility to ensure that we protect them.

Additionally, it is important to protect our SMP volunteers. New policies and guidelines will also be developed to ensure that they, too, are protected.

Stay tuned for more information as the guidelines become available. As changes are implemented, we ask for your continued support and understanding. All new and previously trained Wisconsin SMP volunteers will be subject to the same requirements and guidelines.

Wisconsin SHIP Volunteer Opportunities

The Wisconsin State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) is part of a national program that offers one-on-one counseling and assistance to people with Medicare and to their families or caretakers.

Knowledgeable SHIP counselors help Medicare beneficiaries better understand their Medicare benefits, including Medicare prescription drug coverage and other programs that help reduce the cost of prescription drugs.

Over the next decade, more and more baby boomers will reach age 65, and SHIP counselors will find it increasingly difficult to keep up with demands for counseling. The Wisconsin SHIP would like to increase its capacity to educate, counsel, and assist people on Medicare. You can help!

Volunteering opportunities for those who are Internet savvy include assisting seniors with the Part D Plan Finder. Or you may serve as an Intake Volunteer/Clerical Assistant who gathers needed information, schedules appointments, maintains records, keys in data, etc.

You can make a difference while learning valuable skills: SHIP Volunteers say that they enjoy being mentally and socially active and have grown professionally while serving seniors in their communities.

Note that insurance agents, insurance brokers and financial planners are not eligible to serve as SHIP volunteers.

Demand for SHIP services varies by location. To find out about volunteering opportunities near you, contact Rita Cairns, SHIP Director, via email at Rita.Cairns@Wisconsin.gov. In the subject line of your email, please write: SHIP Volunteer Opportunities.

SouthernCare Charged with Medicare Fraud

SouthernCare, an Alabama-based hospice company, with offices in Madison and Green Bay, is charged with fraudulently enrolling Madison-area patients in hospice care and charging Medicare for the services.

This is not the first time the for-profit company, with 75 offices in 15 states, has been accused of Medicare fraud. In January 2009, the Birmingham-based company paid the federal government \$24.7 million to settle similar claims in Alabama.

Karina Christensen of Waunakee, former clinical director of SouthernCare's Madison office, filed the suit in February in U.S. District Court in Madison. The suit was unsealed Wednesday, September 14.

This is the first known Medicare fraud case against the company since the \$24.7 million settlement, said Christensen's attorney, Nora Hitchcock Cross of Milwaukee. She said, "It does appear that the lesson was not learned. We believe this is a nationwide practice, and we're talking large sums of money."

Christensen alleges SouthernCare charged Medicare for care provided to patients who did not have terminal illnesses. She claims her supervisors encouraged enrollment of patients who were not terminally ill and dismissed Christensen's complaints that doing such was illegal. Shortly after sending the board and the regional director a letter about her concerns in August 2010, she was fired.

The suit says, "SouthernCare encouraged the practice of admitting and falsely billing for unqualified patients" by setting goals "based on the number of new admissions and the average daily census of patients." For example, one person was listed as having heart disease, "showed no signs or symptoms of heart disease." Another person admitted as a "cancer patient" was stated as free of cancer in her medical records, according to the suit.

The suit comes as two other for-profit hospice companies recently opened offices in Madison, creating a new level of competition in a market long dominated by HospiceCare Inc., a non-profit. Saint Jude Hospice, based in Iowa, opened its offices in April, and Heartland Hospice Services, based in Ohio, opened a Madison office in June.

SouthernCare, a for-profit company with 75 offices in 15 states, opened its Madison office in 2007. It also has an office in Green Bay.

Source: Wisconsin State Journal (9/15/2011)

Abri Health Plan Inc. to Pay Medicare Fraud Settlement

Abri Health Plan, Inc. of Germantown and its parent company, Universal American Financial Corp., of Missouri have agreed to pay \$4.8 million to settle a health care fraud claim that was instigated by two former employees under the False Claims Act. The two whistleblowers filed a complaint in 2008 claiming the company misrepresented its Medicare Part C coverage plans in violation of federal regulations by withholding key information about the products and enrolling some customers without their consent.

The whistleblowers, James Mlaker and J.D. Webb, will share more than \$900,000 of the settlement. Mlaker was an Abri sales agent, and Webb was a manager for the company, which did business as Today's Health in Greenfield. Attorney Nola Hitchcock Cross represented the two former employees in federal court.

According to the settlement agreement, federal prosecutors allege that Abri sales agents paid doctors for referrals, paid clients to sign up for Part C coverage, misled clients about the scope of the coverage, and enrolled clients without their consent. Abri and its parent company deny the allegations. As part of the settlement the government and the two former employees waive certain claims that they might be able to bring against the companies related to the conduct at issue. However, the federal government could still bring criminal or tax actions related to the conduct.

Source: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (9/26/2011)

Reprinted with permission from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Consumer Alert: Be Cautious of Suspicious Phone Calls to 608 Area Code

August 31, 2011

MADISON – The Wisconsin Bureau of Consumer Protection is receiving an increased number of contacts from consumers in the “608” area code reporting suspicious phone calls. The caller identifies themselves from “Bank of America,” congratulates you on winning prize money in a Publishers Clearing House or Readers Digest sweepstakes, and asks you to wire transfer money to cover the processing fees for the prize.

“This is a sophisticated scam using well-known company names to bait consumers,” said Sandy Chalmers, Administrator of the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection. “Scammers like to pressure potential victims into wiring money because it allows them to take the money and run.” Consumer Protection offers the following tips:

- Don't pay to collect sweepstakes winnings. That's a sure sign of a rip-off.
- Wiring money is like sending cash; once you've sent it, you won't get it back. It's nearly impossible to reverse the transaction or trace the money once it has been sent. Many of these phone calls can even originate overseas.
- Never wire money to someone you don't know.
- Never send money or provide personal information over the phone unless you initiate the contact and know you are dealing with a trusted source.

For more information or to file a consumer complaint, visit the Bureau of Consumer Protection's website at www.datcp.wisconsin.gov; via e-mail at datcphotline@wisconsin.gov or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

Vietnam Vet Uncovers Medicaid Fraud

Wisconsin SMP staff and volunteers are always on the lookout for news to share. Ken Anderson, SMP volunteer, recently forwarded an article that he discovered at FoxNews.com.

The September 14th article is about a wheelchair-bound Vietnam veteran who uncovered Medicaid fraud. The veteran spent seven years investigating a company after he was told that he had maxed out his Medicaid benefits. His investigation revealed that the government had been billed for services and care that he never received.

Thanks to his perseverance, the company that was fraudulently billing the government agreed to pay \$121.5 million in reimbursements and penalties to the Medicaid program and \$8.4 million to the Veterans Administration. The company also paid a \$20 million fine.

The veteran also received \$15 million for his diligence in uncovering this fraud. To read the entire article, please visit: http://www.foxnews.com/us/2011/09/14/wheelchair-bound-vietnam-vet-uncovers-multimillion-dollar-medical-aid-fraud/?cmpid=cmt_email_Gigya_Wheelchair-Bound_Vietnam_Vet_Uncovers_Multimillion_Dollar_Medical_Aid_Fraud

Health Care Fraud Prosecutions Projected to Rise 85% in 2011

New statistics show that federal health care fraud prosecutions in the first eight months of fiscal year 2011 are on pace to rise 85% as compared to last year. So far, 903 prosecutions have been made this year, which is already 24% more than the 731 people prosecuted in all of fiscal year 2010. Prosecutions have risen 71% from five years ago, according to the data.

The statistics were released by the non-partisan Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, a research organization at Syracuse University that submits Freedom of Information Act requests for government data, and then reports the results.

In 2010, the government recovered a record \$4 billion from health fraud cases after the Affordable Care Act was enacted. The Medicare actuary has predicted that provisions of the new federal health care would ultimately net \$4.9 billion in fraud and abuse savings over the next 10 years. The recovered money will be rolled back into the Medicare program.

Source: USA Today (8/30/2011)

91 Individuals Charged with Medicare Fraud Across U.S.

On September 7, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced that a nationwide takedown by Medicare Fraud Strike Force operations in eight cities has resulted in charges against 91 defendants for their alleged participation in Medicare fraud schemes involving approximately \$295 million in false billing.

Seventy individuals were charged in indictments unsealed the week of the announcement. More than 55 defendants had been arrested by the afternoon of September 7th, in addition to others who turned themselves in to authorities

Among those charged was a doctor in Detroit who allegedly billed Medicare for services provided to the deceased and who claimed that he performed psychotherapy treatments more than 24 hours a day. Other doctors, nurses, and health-care company owners were charged with claiming payments for services that were medically unnecessary or never provided, officials said.

In Miami, 45 defendants, including a doctor and a nurse, are accused of participating in submitting \$159 million in false Medicare billings for home health care and other services.

In another case, 24 defendants are charged for participating in a community mental health center fraud scheme involving more than \$50 million in fraudulent billing. The defendants allegedly paid recruiters to refer ineligible beneficiaries to the mental health center. In some instances, beneficiaries who were residents of a halfway house were allegedly threatened with eviction if they did not agree to visit the mental health center.

The Strike Force carried out the raids in cities that also included Baton Rouge, Houston, Dallas and Chicago. Officials said the crackdown will continue.

This coordinated effort involved the highest amount of false Medicare billings in a single takedown in the Strike Force's history, and the arrests marked the most recent step in a campaign against fraud that the Obama administration calls a key part of its health-care reform agenda.

"The health-care system is part of our nation's infrastructure, and we must do everything in our power to protect the integrity of Medicare," said FBI Executive Assistant Director Shawn Henry.

Sources: http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/91-charged-with-medicare-fraud-across-us/2011/09/07/gIQApV7DAK_story.html and <http://www.stopmedicarefraud.gov/HEATnews/dc.html#sep-07-2011>

SMP Activities

Date	Activity	County
September 29	SMP Booth-UW Volunteer Fair-Madison	Dane
October 4	SMP Booth-Beloit Senior Fair	Rock
October 5	SMP Presentation-State Association of Volunteer Partners	Eau Claire
October 5	SMP Booth-Forever Young Senior Festival-Green Bay	Brown
October 5	SMP Volunteer Foundations Training-Eagle River	Vilas
October 7	SMP Booth-Senior Health & Safety Fair-Tomah	Monroe
October 10	SMP Booth-Triad Crime Prevention & Safety Expo	Dane
October 11	SMP Booth-23 rd Colloquium on Aging Conference	Dane
October 13	SMP Booth-Monona Senior Center Flu Shot Clinic	Dane
October 13-14	Wisconsin AIRS Conference-Wisconsin Dells	Sauk
October 14	SMP Booth-NW Senior Services-Black Earth	Dane
October 18	SMP Info at Retired Educators' District Meeting	Chippewa
October 19	SMP Booth-Ho-Chunk Health Fair-Black River Falls	Jackson
October 20	SMP Booth-Senior Health Fair-Two Rivers	Manitowoc
October 22	SMP Booth-Family Caregiver Resource Fair-Madison	Dane
October 24	SMP Presentation-Republican Women's Group-Eau Claire	Eau Claire
October 25	SMP Booth-Community Health Fair-Sturgeon Bay	Door
October 27	SMP Booth-Senior Health Fair-Medford	Taylor
October 27	SMP Booth-Monona Senior Center Flu Shot Clinic	Dane
October 28	SMP Booth-Rock County Senior Fair-Janesville	Rock
November 5	SMP Booth-Diabetes Fair-Black River Falls	Jackson
November 7	SMP Booth-Monona Senior Center Flu Shot Clinic	Dane
November 9	SMP Booth-Caregiver Forum-Madison	Dane
November 9	SMP Presentation-Montello	Marquette
November 11	SMP Presentation-Separated, Divorced, and Widowed Group	Washington
November 14	SMP Booth-Caregiver Fair-Eau Claire	Eau Claire

CWAG Activities

Date	Activity	County
September 19	CWAG District 1 Fall Meeting-Old County Buffet-Onalaska	La Crosse
September 22	Part D Annual Enrollment Training-Madison	Dane
October 6	CWAG District 6 Fall Meeting-Park Building-Roberts	St. Croix
October 7	CWAG District 2B Fall Meeting-Burlington Water Department	Kenosha
October 13	CWAG District 7 Fall Meeting-Nekoosa Community Center	Wood
October 14	CWAG District 8 Fall Meeting-Siren Senior Community Center	Burnett
October 17	CWAG District 4 Fall Meeting-Clarion Hotel-Green Bay	Brown
November 4	CWAG District 1 Fall Meeting-Evansville Senior Center	Rock
November 7-10	Senior Statesmanship Advocacy Training Program-Madison	Dane

We are always looking for opportunities to support our colleagues in the aging network. Please contact Wisconsin SMP and let us know about upcoming events in your area.

HospiceCare Inc. to Offer Two Question-and-Answer Seminars in October

Two free educational seminars will be presented by HospiceCare Inc. in Madison during October. Both will be held at the Don & Marilyn Anderson HospiceCare Center, 5395 E. Cheryl Parkway, Madison. On Monday, October 3, from 2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., HospiceCare will offer “What You Should Know About Planning a Funeral.” Participants will learn about the many choices involved in funeral planning. On Tuesday, October 11, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., HospiceCare will offer “Coping with Grief at the Holidays,” a presentation that offers help to people grieving during the holiday season. Participants will learn coping skills and ideas for creating holiday rituals to remember loved ones. Pre-registration is requested; please call Carrie Glantz, HospiceCare public affairs, at (608) 327-7202.

HospiceCare Inc. to Offer Four Grief Support Opportunities in October

In October, HospiceCare Inc. will begin two grief support group series, offer a recurring support group and provide an introductory session for those grieving the death of a loved one. All of the sessions are open to the public and are provided without charge, unless noted otherwise. All groups require pre-registration and are held at the Don & Marilyn Anderson HospiceCare Center, 5395 E. Cheryl Parkway, Madison, unless otherwise noted. To register, call (608) 276-4660 and ask to speak with a grief counselor.

- ***Powerful Tools for Caregivers*** is held Tuesdays, October 4 through November 8, from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. This six-week series offers practical tips and tools to help family caregivers be successful in their caregiving role. There is a \$10 fee to attend.
- ***Mother Loss Grief Support Group*** is held Wednesdays, October 5 through October 26, from 10:00 a.m. to noon. This four-week series is for those grieving the loss of their mother.
- ***Bridges Weekly Support Group*** is held every Wednesday from 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. This ongoing group is for adults who are grieving the death of a loved one. Pre-registration is not required.
- ***Introduction to Grief*** is an informative session for adults that offers suggestions on how to navigate the grieving process and provides information about HospiceCare grief support groups. This session is available by appointment only. Call Mary Severson at (608) 327-7182 to make an appointment.

Understanding Non-Alzheimer’s Dementias: Lewy Body Dementia

Learn the unique symptoms and treatment of dementia with Lewy bodies, strategies and techniques to help maintain function and maximize quality of life and resources available to help. Presenters Dr. Kim Petersen and Mary Reines, LCSW, Alzheimer’s & Dementia Alliance, will discuss Lewy body dementia on Thursday, October 6, from 9 a.m. to noon at Oak Park Place, Big Top Room, 800 Waldo St, Baraboo. This special presentation is free for family caregivers, \$15 for professionals (payable at the door) and supported in part by a grant from the Helen Bader Foundation. Call (888) 308-6251 to register. To learn more about the Alzheimer’s & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin: www.alzwisc.org.

FRAUD ALERT – ELECTRONIC VERSION

In previous issues, we told you that Wisconsin SMP *Fraud Alert* will be sent electronically unless we receive a “request for a paper copy” from you.

Contact Patti Wiersma at pwiersma@cwag.org,
giving her your e-mail address,
to add to our list.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Check out the new Wisconsin SMP web site
www.wisconsinsmp.org

You Can also Access Our Publication by visiting our new web site www.wisconsinsmp.org
Or you can visit the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups web site www.cwag.org
Click on Publications then click on Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) and scroll down
and click on the edition you wish to view.

ATTENTION: All of you with E-mail...

In an effort to save paper, postage and be “volunteer friendly,” we will E-mail issues of the *Fraud Alert* to those who have E-mail. Please contact Patti Wiersma at pwiersma@cwag.org, giving her your e-mail address to add to our list. **WE DO SUGGEST THAT YOU PRINT EACH ISSUE AND SAVE IT IN YOUR MEDICARE BINDER FOR FUTURE USE. Thank you!**

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