

The Center Serves SMPs

By Ginny Paulson

SMP Resource Center Director

The scope of work given SMP Projects – conduct statewide public education, recruit and train volunteers, target services to hard-to-reach populations, appropriately refer fraud complaints and more – can be daunting. But it’s work that need not be done alone. With that in mind, AoA formed and funded the National Consumer Protection Technical Resource Center, The Center of Services and Support for SMP Projects. This SMP Resource Center (also referred to as simply “The Center”) guides and supports both new and experienced SMP staff. It acts as a conduit of information from AoA to SMPs and also takes direc-

tion directly from AoA. However, The Center similarly operates as a conduit of information *from* SMPs to AoA. AoA seeks grass roots input to help guide the development of the national SMP program.

The Center’s Mentor Program orients new SMPs to the network and is part of the cooperative agreement between AoA and new SMP grantees. For experienced SMPs, The Center serves as a central source of information, expertise and technical assistance; promotes the sharing of knowledge and successful practices among SMPs; provides on-going support and information on issues and trends in health care fraud, waste and abuse; supports SMP use of the SMART FACTS system; and develops new products and tools for the national SMP network. Resources include:

1. www.smpresource.org website. Highlights of our website include: the Resource Library, a repository of materials developed by SMPs that can be replicated by other SMPs; the SMP Locator, a searchable on-line directory of the SMP contacts for every state; SMP feature stories; recorded webinars; instruction manuals; and other documents to help SMPs with program management and outreach.



Back row, from left: Carol Dahms and Ginny Paulson. Front row, from left: Maureen Patterson, Shirley Merner and Heather Flory

SMP Resource Center

2. **Nationwide Toll-free number:** 877-808-2468. This number is intended for SMP use, though anyone can call. The Center does not provide complaint resolution for beneficiaries or other direct services to beneficiaries; callers are referred to the SMPs in their states. Because The Center is not staffed to be a national call center, the toll-free number is not published in national publications such as the *My Medicare & You* handbook. The website's SMP Locator is promoted.
3. **Monthly Mentor Calls.** SMPs share outreach ideas, scam alerts, receive assistance from The Center, if needed, and network.
4. **Webinars.** Web conferencing technology is used to conduct remote training for our nationwide audience. Some webinars are

conducted by The Center, often on the topic of SMART FACTS, and others are conducted by guest speakers on topics such as health care fraud and consumer protection.

5. **Written guides.** Examples include the *SMP Resource Manual*, the SMART FACTS operations manual and the SMP Foundations volunteer training program.

The SMP Resource Center was founded in October 2003 and is operated by Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging (HVAAA) in Waterloo, Iowa. HVAAA subcontracts with Health Benefits ABCs for consultation, product development and evaluation. HVAAA also subcontracts with Social Solutions Inc. for continuous support of the SMP SMART FACTS reporting and program management software. ●

Meet The Center Staff

Shirley Merner

Consumer Protection Division Director
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Shirley Merner directs the Consumer Protection Division of Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging (HVAAA) in Waterloo, Iowa. She is responsible for administrating the SMP Resource Center, the Iowa SMP program and the AARP Foundation's Fraud Prevention call center. Along with oversight her Center role includes: enhancing the national visibility of SMP program; fostering SMP partnerships at state and national levels; disseminating the SMP message at national conferences; educat-

ing members of Congress on issues related to SMP activities; and conducting the monthly mentor calls.

Shirley has been active with the SMP project since its inception. In 1995, she implemented a pilot project (Project Heartland), designed to educate beneficiaries in 10 of Iowa's counties to become responsible consumers of Medicare. During that year, the pilot program returned \$10 for every \$1 received and caught the attention of Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa.



SMP Resource Center

Ginny Paulson

SMP Resource Center Director
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Ginny Paulson manages every aspect of The Center. She works with the Administration on Aging (AoA) to help disseminate AoA guidance to the SMPs and also coordinates the process of collecting SMP feedback from the field back to AoA. She's responsible for oversight of the SMP web-based data reporting system (SMART FACTS); helps conduct both group and individual SMART FACTS training, specializing in complex issues and site management; writes and updates the SMART FACTS operations manual; and also works with the technology vendor to ensure the system operates effectively. Other responsibilities include general grant, subcontract and communications management for The Center.

Ginny has 17 years of experience in government-funded nonprofit program management, the last 11 years in the field of aging. Prior to joining The Center in August 2007, she was the program manager for the Iowa Association of Area Agencies on Aging (i4a) and was responsible for the organization's website, information and assistance database, statewide staff training and caregiver outreach. During that time, she also consulted for The Center regarding the pilot outcome measurement project for SMPs. Prior to her years with i4a, she coordinated the outcome measurement, caregiver support and refugee outreach projects at Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging. She holds a bachelors degree in English from the College of Saint Benedict and is a licensed social worker.



Heather Flory

Training Manager
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Heather Flory manages The Center's web-based training provided to the SMP network, including regular SMART FACTS webinars as well as webinars on other topics of interest. She also creates SMART FACTS job aides and provides one-on-one instruction on SMART FACTS data entry and policy. Heather has also been involved in developing the volunteer training curriculum.

She's well-suited to her role. Heather has 9 years of teaching experience, including 3 years as an English as a Second Language instructor and 6 years as a corporate trainer in the mortgage banking industry. With a bachelor's degree in Spanish and a master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL), she specializes in web-based training.



SMP Resource Center

Maureen Patterson

Media Manager

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Maureen Patterson manages The Center's website: www.smpresource.org. This includes giving users access to the Resource Library and updating the database that feeds SMP Locator, as well as creating new pages on the site. She publishes *The Sentinel* newsletter four times a year and the electronic *eDigest* newsletter monthly. She also works with national news media to promote information about the SMP program.

A career journalist, Maureen holds a bachelor of journalism degree from the University of Missouri. She spent 8 years working for real estate publications, half of those as editor of a national architectural magazine. She started her career at a weekly newspaper, worked in media relations for a national nonprofit and marketed and edited books.



Carol Dahms

Administrative Assistant

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Carol completes a range of behind-the-scenes tasks that keep The Center running, including answering the SMP Resource Center toll-free number. She updates calendars and distribution lists and sends out meeting reminders, including mentor call announcements. She also writes the mentor call notes. SMPs often call Carol when they want to know who to contact or where to go to find information. She also helps them access webinars. She maintains an archive of all publications and regularly updates contact lists.

Carol has worked in a variety of jobs over the years. She's been a yarn store employee and a gardener and can count such organizations as the Internal Revenue Service, the U.S. Department of Education and the Universities of Kansas and Northern Iowa on her resumé. She holds a bachelors degree in business from Charleston (South Carolina) Southern University and a masters degree in textiles from the University of Georgia in Athens. ◆

