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**GROUP EDUCATIONAL SESSION FOR CAREGIVERS AND
BENEFICIARIES**

The SMP of New Jersey does not use power point presentations when conducting Group Educational Sessions to older adults or their caregivers. Power point presentations tend to be more of a reading exercise or a formal lecture. The SMP of New Jersey prefers to address older adults or their caregivers on a face to face conversation while providing stories and examples of fraud, waste and abuse that older adults can identify with.

Since the audience at the SMP National Conference will be mostly SMP staff members and volunteers, the presentation will begin by saying:

“If you are not already, presume that you are now a caregiver caring for a senior over 65 or a senior, over the age of 65, in Original Medicare, with a Medigap Policy and a Part D plan or in a Medicare Advantage plan with drug coverage (MAPD). All of you take at least one prescription drug.”

Introduction:

Good Morning (or good afternoon), I am Charles Clarkson, with the Jewish Family & Vocational Service of Middlesex County (JFVS). I am Coordinator of the SMP of New Jersey, a federally funded program of the U.S. Administration on Aging.

[To break the ice, I tell the senior group how I got the job as Coordinator.]

Let me tell you how I got this job. I think you might find it interesting. Basically 5 years ago, my wife became President of JFVS and one morning she came to me and said “Honey, and I knew I was in trouble. Honey, JFVS has this grant from

AoA and the Coordinator just quit. You're retired; you're not doing anything, why don't you take over the position. You're also a lawyer, you can learn about Medicare." In response I said, "You know, I like being retired, playing golf and traveling whenever I want. No thanks." Then she says, "One more thing, honey, you're driving me crazy, get the hell out the house." And that's how I got the job.

Our mission at the SMP of New Jersey is three-fold. We want to educate seniors to protect them from Medicare fraud, waste and abuse. We train volunteers to assist us in reaching out to seniors and their caregivers and we investigate complaints on behalf of beneficiaries.

First, let's talk about how much fraud, waste and abuse cost Medicare and Medicaid.

1. Medicare estimates that they lose an estimated \$19 billion a year on fraud, waste and abuse.
2. The FBI estimates that for every 10 dollars spent on medical services, \$1 is lost to fraud, waste and abuse. This amounts to \$220 billion a year.

So, let me ask you, why do we care?

[Answer from audience, "It's our money"]

Exactly, it's your money. It comes out of your tax dollars. When you worked all of your lives, money was withheld from your pay checks for Medicare and Social Security and when you turn 65, you can take advantage of the moneys you put into these programs.

Six months ago, when I was giving presentations, I was telling beneficiaries that Medicare was estimating that they would be bankrupt in 2019. Well, with the current economic recession, Medicare now estimates that it will be bankrupt in 2017. If we could stop fraud, waste and abuse, it would go a long way to keep Medicare solvent.

So let's start by reviewing some general rules that all seniors should follow to protect themselves from Medicare fraud, waste and abuse, or that caregivers can follow to protect their loved ones.

The first and most important rule: Beneficiaries and their caregivers must protect their Medicare numbers at all times.

Secondly, Medicare and Medicaid will never call a beneficiary or a caregiver on the telephone. Never. So if you are a caregiver, or a beneficiary, and a person calls you on the telephone, and they say they represent Medicare, what are you going to do?

[From audience “Hang up”].

Yes, hang up. Medicare will not call you on the telephone.

Also, Medicare does not sell or endorse any product. So, let’s say a beneficiary or a caregiver on behalf of a beneficiary wants to buy a new walker. You go into your local pharmacy that sells durable medical equipment and the pharmacist says, “Mrs. Jones, this walker is the best we have and it has been approved by Medicare. Walk out the door and go to a more honest provider. All this provider is doing is trying to sell you a more expensive piece of equipment. Medicare does not endorse or sell walkers or any other piece of durable medical equipment.

Besides those general rules, there are some specific things caregivers and beneficiaries can do.

[Hold up a Medicare Summary Notice.]

This is a Medicare Summary Notice. Since I am not on Medicare, I stole this from a beneficiary. But I did cross out her name and number.

Whenever you see a Medicare provider, you get this statement 90 days after the service. Unfortunately, many caregivers and beneficiaries do not read the Medicare Summary Notices carefully.

A man goes to the hospital on his doctor’s advice as an out patient to take some tests. When he gets his statement from the hospital, he notices that he did not get one of the tests that he is being billed for. He calls up the hospital and asks for the billing department. The clerk looks him up on the computer and tells him that the services were rendered, the bill is over due. Please pay the bill. He responds by saying, you don’t seem to understand. I am a man and I can tell you that I did not get a pap smear.

Mistakes happen all the time. Caregivers and beneficiaries must read their statements carefully and I don't care where you get your statements from. Medicare, hospitals, Part D Plans, Medigap policies, private insurance. Don't just read the bottom line and toss it in the garbage. Make sure you got the services you are being billed for.

Now let me ask you. Is there anyone in the audience younger than I am? [We started out with the presumption that every one was over 65.]

I am younger than all of you and I can't remember what I did yesterday. Talk about senior moments, I have senior weeks. But what I do, and what I want each of you to do, is keep a calendar.

[Show Personal Health Care Journal.] Every time you go to a doctor, write it down in your Personal Health Care Journal. Every time you take a test, write it down. Then, when you get your Medicare Summary Notice, you compare the Medicare Summary Notice with your calendar and make sure you are being billed for the services and tests you got.

Now that we have reviewed some of steps you should take to protect yourself from Medicare fraud, waste and abuse, I am going to discuss some of the more common scams.

Protecting yourself from "Free" services.

Let's say I am a Doctor. I just graduated medical school and I am burdened with \$250,000 in tuition debt. I need to make money. So I open a clinic in downtown U.S.A. I send my representatives to senior buildings, senior centers, community centers, etc. to offer free services to introduce my clinic to the community. They offer a free check-up and a free x-ray. That doesn't motivate you to go, so the representative offers more. If you come to our clinic right now, we will give you \$100 in cash, a toaster oven and a free lunch. You say to yourself, gee, I am going to Atlantic City next week with my senior group. I could use \$100 in cash. That would make a nice gambling fund. So you get in the van and you go to the clinic. But, before they give you your free service, what do you give them?

[From audience "Your Medicare information."]

Three months later, you get your statement from Medicare and that so called “free” service, has been billed to Medicare for \$5,000 for services never provided. You’ve been scammed.

Now, let me ask you a question. Are there any crooks in the room? Please raise your hands. [A person usually raises his or her hand.]

Okay, let me ask you. How else can I make money with the information you provided me? [Response from audience.]

That’s right. I can sell it. I may be able to make \$200 for every Medicare number I can sell to other dishonest providers.

Besides selling it, what else can I do with this information, other than bill for the initial visit? [Wait for any answer from audience.] I can bill more. Remember, I have 90 days before a caregiver or beneficiary sees a statement from Medicare. I can do a lot of damage in 90 days.

Be aware of “free” services. Whenever you hear the word “free,” you should say to yourself, oh oh, I better watch out. When it comes to Medical services, nothing is free. There is one exception. Does anyone know what that is? I will tell you. Me. I’m free. I am here to educate you. I want you to be the Sy Sims of Medicare. Who is Sy Sims and what is his motto? He sells clothes and his motto is, “An educated consumer is our best customer.” Well I want all of you to be better educated healthcare consumers so that you will not be victims of fraud, waste and abuse in Medicare and Medicaid and you will become the SMP’s best customer.

Another area where caregivers and beneficiaries need to be careful is hospital bills. Hospitals are notorious over-billers. Why? Hospitals are businesses. They need to bill to make money. The more they bill, the more they earn.

A woman in her 80’s goes into the hospital. Spends 3 days in the hospital. Comes out of the hospital. Everything is fine. A short time later, she gets a statement from the hospital. She almost has a heart attack because the bill is so high.

Before I finish her story, there are 2 rules about hospitals all caregivers and beneficiaries should be aware of. Rule number 1. When you leave a hospital,

don't pay your bill in full. The hospital might say to you, you have a deductible or this test your doctor ordered is not a covered service, please pay your bill.

Remember, hospitals are not prisons. You say to them, when I go home and review my statement, if I agree with it, and I owe a balance, I will pay it.

Rule number 2. Always ask for a daily itemized statement so that you can review all the items that they are charging you for. Not just a summary of the items.

Now, to get back to the woman in her 80's. She looks at her statement, can't believe how high it is and calls the hospital and demands a daily itemized statement, which she gets a short time later in the mail. She reviews the statement and notices some very strange charges. The first thing she noticed, they mistakenly billed her for a baby crib in her room. She hadn't had a baby in 50 years.

The next thing she noticed, she was billed for sheets and towels separately from the room rate. Obviously, illegal.

Thirdly, and the most interesting, they billed her \$129 for what was described in the statement as a "Mucous Recovery System." Does anyone want to guess what a mucous recovery system is?

[Await audience response.]

That's right. A box of tissues. I tell this story to emphasize the need to read your statements carefully. Don't just look at the bottom line. Also, next time you go to a hospital, bring your own tissues.

Prescription drug fraud

Now let's talk about prescription drug fraud. Let me ask you a question. How many of you do not take prescription drugs?

[Usually, only a couple of people raise their hands, especially in senior groups. Since most senior take prescriptions, this is a good topic to discuss.]

So, most of us take prescription drugs. Let's take this scenario. Let's say I'm a pharmacist. I'm in the middle of a divorce. My wife ran off with a younger man

and she took all the money out of our checking account. I'm desperate for money. So I come up with a scheme to cheat Medicare.

You are a Medicare beneficiary. You go to your doctor and he gives you a prescription for 30 pills and if you had no insurance, the pills would cost you \$5 a pill, or \$150 for the month. Not unusual. You take your prescription to this pharmacist and you or your caregiver, pick up the prescription. How many of you, when you get home, count the pills in the vial? [Wait for audience response.] You must count your pills. Short pilling is a major concern.

Once, when I told this story to a gentleman stood up and said, Mr. Clarkson, I don't need to count my pills. I get them in the mail and they are sealed. Well, I said, how do you think they get in there? By magic? Short-pilling can happen even in mail order prescriptions.

Let's say the pharmacist put in 28 pills instead of 30. The pharmacist will, of course, bill for the full 30 pills. At \$5 a pill, he just made \$10. And, if you went home and counted your pills and you were 2 short, what would you do? [Wait for audience response.] That's right, you would call up or go back to pick up you 2 pills. 99 point 9 percent of the time the pharmacist will say to you, sorry, we made a mistake. So can I accuse him of fraud, in this case? No, fraud is an intentional crime. So, start counting your pills. If you're short the first time, give the benefit of the doubt to the pharmacist, but go back and get your bills. Make a note of it. If it happens a 2nd or a 3rd time, you're probably being cheated. And if you are being cheated, probably many people like you are being cheated.

Once, when I told this story to a group of seniors in NJ, a man stood up and said he was a retired pharmacist and that I had just insulted him and every pharmacist in the State. And besides, he said, I am not going to get rich off \$10. I said to him, don't take this personally, but if I am a pharmacist at a busy pharmacist, I could be filling 500 prescriptions a day. If I am only cheating 200 people, that's \$2,000 a day. That's a lot of money.

Let's continue with our scenario. You pick up your prescription and you go home and you count your pills and they're all there. How do you know you are getting the right pill? [Wait for audience response.]

That's right. You look for the same size, shape, color and marking. If any one of these is different, don't take the pill. It's too dangerous. Make sure you find out why it changed. And remember, generics can change from one visit to the next because they can be manufactured by different manufacturers.

I like to tell the story of a woman, who goes to her doctor. The doctor says, "Mrs. Jones, you have bronchitis. I'm going to give you a prescription for Cipro." She takes the prescription, goes to the pharmacist and picks it up. When she gets home to take her prescription, she notices that the Cipro, instead of being oval and white, was square and blue. Thinking the pill had changed since it she had not taken Cipro in a while, she takes the pill. A short while later, she's in the ambulance in anaphylactic shock. Whatever she took, she was allergic to. Fortunately, she survives. When she gets home from the hospital, she looks at the prescription and realizes that instead of giving her Cipro, the pharmacy had mistakenly given her Ceftin, another antibiotic. She goes back to the pharmacy and tells the pharmacist what happened. "You almost killed me", she says. The pharmacist says, "Sorry, we made a mistake."

Mistakes happen all the time and don't believe it can't happen to you.

Now, let's go one step further. You go to you doctor and he gives you a prescription. You or your caregiver goes to the pharmacist and picks it up. You count the pills. They are all there. Great. You look at them. Same size, shape, color and markings. Good. Next question. How do you know if the pill is counterfeit or not? Are there any indications?

[Audience response]

Let me suggest 3 things. If you take a pill and it has a vile or disgusting taste, don't take it.

If the pill has a strange odor, it could be adulterated, don't take it.

If it doesn't do what it's supposed to do, stop taking it. You have taken these pills on a regular basis. If you're not getting the desired effect, stop taking the pill.

What do you think is the most counterfeited medication in America?

[Await audience response]

It's Viagra. So all you men out there. Watch out.

To show you how difficult this can be, Viagra is made by Pfizer, the largest drug company in the world. They are very concerned about counterfeit Viagra. I went to a class be given by the head of security for Pfizer. He put 2 pills on the table and said to the class. "Both of these pills are Viagra. One is fake. One is real. Tell me the real one. And here is a magnifying glass if you think that will help."

So we all took turns looking at the pills and I said to him. This pill has crisp markings. The color is good and it is well packaged. This is the real pill. No, he said, that's the fake one. It looks better than ours.

So, always be careful. Don't buy your drugs over the internet and don't buy them from overseas. It is too risky. Buy your drugs from your local pharmacy. Someone you can trust.

Complaints

If you suspect fraud, waste and abuse, there are 3 steps I would like you to take.

First, call the provider and try to get the issue resolved. Sometimes a simple telephone call can resolve the issue.

Secondly, if you are not satisfied with the results of the call to the provider, call Medicare and make a complaint.

If you are still unhappy with the call to Medicare, then call me at the SMP of New Jersey and I will try to help you. However, if you call me, please leave a clear message as I am on the road most of the time. Also, if you call me and leave a message, please don't tell my wife, she's very jealous of long term relationships. An investigation by the SMP of New Jersey can take a while to resolve.

SMP Group Session Post Survey

That wraps up my presentation. The last thing I would like you to do is to complete the survey in your packages. This survey will be used by the Administration on Aging and other government officials to help us learn if our efforts are worthwhile. Please do not put your name or Medicare number on the survey. If you do, I will cheat you.

Thanks for having me. If there are any questions, I will be happy to stay and answer them.

Hand Outs:

“What is the SMP of New Jersey”

Tip sheet “How to Protect Yourself From Medicare/Medicaid Fraud”

Tip sheet “Seniors With Part D Prescriptions Plans Can Change Plans Every Year”

Group Session Post Survey

SMP of New Jersey Personal Health Care Journal