

Related Change Request (CR) #: N/A

Medlearn Matters Number: SE0501

Related CR Release Date: N/A

The First in a Series of Medlearn Matters Articles for Providers On Medicare's New Prescription Drug Program

MMA - Coming Soon - The New Medicare Prescription Drug Program

Provider Types Affected

All physicians, providers, suppliers, and their staff providing service to people with Medicare

Provider Action Needed

STOP – Impact to You

On January 1, 2006, a very important new benefit will be available to your Medicare patients. These new Medicare Prescription Drug Plans will be of significant value to your patients by providing assistance with prescription drug expenses. This program is authorized under the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA). Your patients may ask you about this new benefit.

CAUTION – What You Need to Know

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is preparing an extensive campaign for both providers and beneficiaries, and will be disseminating information to these audiences. Over the next year, as materials are developed, you will be notified through a series of Medlearn Matters articles and other resources. Some providers will choose to be active in giving information to their Medicare patients, and we will help you do that. CMS encourages and appreciates the work providers are willing to do to help people with Medicare learn about this important new benefit.

GO – What You Need to Do

Stay informed. Go to the newly established web site:

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform/pdbma/>

and check it often as new information is always being added. This easy-to-use website has a "General Information" link to the press releases, issue papers, fact sheets, and full copies and summaries of both regulations. Users can follow the menu and select the area that best matches their area of interest. Refer your Medicare patients to information resources – **1-800- MEDICARE** and

www.medicare.gov.

Background

On December 8, 2003, the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) was enacted, adding a very important new benefit to the Medicare program. This new benefit takes effect on January 1, 2006, and provides a much-

needed new drug benefit to help serve the 41 million Americans who rely on Medicare for their health care needs.

On January 21, 2005, Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson announced the final regulations establishing the new Medicare prescription drug benefit program. This is a very important step in making this great addition to the Medicare program a reality for your Medicare patients.

This is a very special time for your patients with Medicare, full of many exciting program improvements and enhancements. Great opportunities exist right now, through the MMA, to make the Medicare program more personalized and more up to date, and to keep it up to date. The Medicare Drug Benefit is a major step in that direction. A very important step toward fulfilling that opportunity is in the final regulation for the Medicare Drug Benefit Program. Along with the new Medicare Preventive benefits, this major program improvement bring Medicare's coverage up to date with 21st Century prevention-minded medicine.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Because people with Medicare trust their physicians, other clinicians, pharmacists, and other health care providers, you are in a unique position to direct them to the resources available to help them learn about the new benefit. If any of your patients rely on caregivers, CMS appreciates your efforts to get this information into their hands as well.

CMS will be pursuing a number of activities to make sure the physician, provider, and supplier communities know about this new benefit, understand how it works, and will be highlighting the information that may be of most value to your Medicare patients. As educational materials are developed, you will be notified of their availability. These materials will help you and your staff understand the new benefit. CMS will keep you up-to-date with education and outreach efforts on the new drug benefit. Here's how you can stay connected:

- Pay attention to correspondence from your Medicare carrier or fiscal intermediary or your national professional associations---they are part of the information stream from CMS to the community of professionals who serve people with Medicare; sign up for their listservs and read their newsletters;
- Register to receive listserv email messages to alert you when new Medlearn Matters articles have been released on the new drug benefit (and other Medicare information). Medlearn Matters articles provide succinct and timely messages on Medicare claims processing and other changes. These articles can be found on the web at :

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medlearn/matters>

- Participate in CMS Open Door Forums to hear from and ask questions of CMS leadership on topics of interest to your particular provider-type. Information regarding these Open Door Forums may be found on the web at:

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/opendoor>

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