

## **Ch-ch-changes! It's Annual Medicare Enrollment Time Again – Information to share with your Employees!**

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This time of year brings us Thanksgiving, Christmas and other celebrations; a full few months to be sure! However, be sure to schedule in some time to help your aging loved one check their Medicare coverage for the coming year because the annual enrollment period for Medicare is from November 15th through December 31st and you're going to want plenty of time to help them review their current coverage. It is especially important to carefully review their coverage this year because 2010 legislation has made changes to Medicare coverage in 2011.

Getting an early start is especially important this year for 2 reasons. Not only will those currently enrolled be re-enrolling but this is the year that the first wave of Baby Boomers will be enrolling in Medicare for the first time - what Paul Gada of Allsup, a provider of Medicare plan selection services, calls "a perfect storm".

For example, if they're enrolled in original Medicare, starting in 2011 they will be entitled to a free annual physical and wellness plan, as well as other preventive care services. Also, for those with a Medicare prescription drug plan: if their prescription costs are high enough to put them into the "donut hole," (the difference of the initial coverage limit and the catastrophic coverage threshold in Medicare Part D), they will receive a 50% discount on brand-name drugs and a small discount on generic drugs.

Does your loved one currently have a Medicare Advantage plan? If so, there are changes to those plans as well. Starting in 2011, the open enrollment period that used to be between January 1st through March 31st will now run only from January 1st through February 15<sup>th</sup>. In addition, during this period the only option they will have other than to keep their current coverage is to un-enroll from their current Medicare Advantage plan and switch back to original Medicare. However, if they do return to original Medicare and then lose the drug coverage that their Medicare Advantage plan provided, they will be able to enroll in a Medicare prescription drug plan.

These are just a few of the changes; so How and Where do You Start?

- 1) Their current Medicare plan will send them 2 documents: Evidence of Coverage which tells what their current plan covers and what it costs and the Annual Notice of Change which lists changes to the plan for the coming year (starting January 1, 2011). Medicare will also send them the official Medicare handbook which has detailed information about Medicare. This book will help you decide if their current plan is still the right one for them or if they need to make a change. If they haven't received it yet, they will soon (<http://www.medicare.gov> or call 1-800-Medicare).
- 2) Make a list of changes in your loved one's health and drug needs from this current year.
- 3) Review their current Medicare plan and any changes in their needs and consider if their current Medicare plan:

- ~ Covers all services and health-care providers they will need - especially if their health or financial circumstances have changed.
- ~ Cost more or less. Remember that less isn't necessarily better. For example, consider premiums, deductibles, and other out-of-pocket costs such as co-payments or coinsurance costs.
- ~ Covers their drugs - or will they have to pay more and/or will or will not be covered.

After doing the comparisons, you may find you all are happy with your loved one's current plan. If so . . . great! You don't have to do anything!

Not sure how to do the comparison? The official Medicare website, <http://www.medicare.gov> has a tool that will help you compare Medicare plans, Medigap plans, and Medicare prescription drug plans available in your area.

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