

Case Study

My Medicare Matters™: A Unique Campaign Educates People, Simplifies Enrollment

Wendy Zenker

Mrs. Kahn is a 78-year-old woman who takes 10 different medications, spending more than \$400 a month for them. She had heard about the new Medicare prescription drug coverage and felt she needed help to understand which plan might be best for her. In December, Mrs. Kahn attended an educational event sponsored by the National Council on Aging (NCOA) and the Access to Benefits Coalition (ABC), which was part of a national program called My Medicare Matters™. At the session, Mrs. Kahn met with an educator for a one-on-one session about the new drug benefit. The educator went online and utilized some special tools on the My Medicare Matters™ Web site and www.Medicare.gov to input all of Mrs. Kahn's prescriptions and other key information. Twenty-minutes later, Mrs. Kahn was able to review information about all of the options available to her and select a plan that would cut her prescription costs by nearly 50%. In fact, Mrs. Kahn's January bill for prescriptions was less than \$100, nearly 75% less than she paid in January 2005.

Mrs. Bennett is 62-year-old woman who takes 33 different prescription medications that cost between \$500 and \$600 per month, which adds up to between \$6000 and \$7200 annually. After working with an educator at a My Medicare Matters™ event, she was able to find a plan on www.Medicare.gov that would cost

her approximately \$43 per month for all of her prescription drugs, for a total of \$516 annually, a savings of more than 90%.

“The Medicare Modernization Act is the single biggest change in health care delivered by the US government in nearly 40 years,” said James Firman, President and CEO of NCOA. “We are focused on both helping people understand their options, and for those with limited means, also helping them understand and apply for the low income subsidy.”

When the new program was announced, Medicare beneficiaries and those they turn to for advice and help were faced with a lot of information and an array of Medicare prescription drug plan options to choose from. This created a critical need for personalized assistance, access to technology, and objective, unbiased information for consumers and health care providers. In response, NCOA and ABC launched My Medicare Matters™, a national, community-based education program designed to provide a robust, easy-to-under-



A Medicare beneficiary with a My Medicare Matters™ educator during a one-on-one session about the new drug benefit.

stand, Web site and, with on-the-ground resources, a continuous presence in 37 markets throughout the entire Medicare Part D enrollment period.

Step One: Understanding, Learning, Creating

One of the goals of My Medicare Matters™ was to help people with Medicare understand the new Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit and be prepared to make the enrollment

decision that was right for them. Based on research by ABC,* there was a need for personalized help in the community from trusted, local, nonprofit organizations. *My Medicare Matters*[™] used this research in its design, and a key program element included an “on-the-ground” campaign that deployed 37 vans and dozens of trained educators using the latest in wireless technology to 37 markets in 21 states and the District of Columbia. *My Medicare Matters*[™] staff worked continuously throughout the Medicare Part D enrollment period, which ended on May 15, 2006. In more than 300 counties nationwide, the educators participated in more than 2000 local events attended by more than 120,000 people.

Critical to the success of the *My Medicare Matters*[™] campaign was the partnership with local community-based organizations. *My Medicare Matters*[™] brought much-needed resources to the community level—both personalized assistance and technology—but local partners provided the critically important “trust” factor that gave Medicare beneficiaries and their families the assurance that the information that they received was from a trusted source. In addition, testimonials from partici-

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pants in the program identified the independent nature of the information offered as a much-needed relief from the more targeted marketing of many of the plan sponsors.

At these events, beneficiaries like Mrs. Kahn and Mrs. Bennett sat down one-on-one with educators who provided personalized guidance to help them find answers to their questions about the new coverage. Using Internet-based tools, including the *My Medicare*

Matters[™] Web site, NCOA's BenefitsCheckUpRx (a questionnaire that helps users create a personalized report about their prescription savings and other health care options), and Medicare's Prescription Drug Plan Finder, the educators helped beneficiaries gather information, assess their options, compare plans and, if they wished, join a plan online. Statistics show that 90% of program participants reported that *My Medicare Matters*[™] events helped them understand their options.

Step Two: Extending the Program's Reach Online

For those with Internet access or whose family members wanted tools to help their spouses, parents, or grandparents, a new Web site was created at www.MyMedicareMatters.org. The user-friendly Web site provides 7 simple steps and other easy-to-understand information so that people with Medicare can learn about the new coverage in an overview or in more detail if desired. The Web site separates “learning” from “acting,” recognizing that the senior population has a strong interest in understanding the new coverage, and that if a senior first take the time to “learn,” their actions on NCOA's BenefitsCheckUpRx site or www.Medicare.gov will be more effective. Those who were educated have been more successful in navigating and understanding their options on the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Finder.

The *My Medicare Matters*[™] Web site, which is also available in Spanish at www.MiMedicareImporta.org, was designed with the input of a multidisciplinary advisory board, including physicians, pharmacists, employers, and consumer advocates. The Web site features a special section for family and friends of people with Medicare so that they can provide assistance to their loved ones and includes a checklist of information they need to collect.

“MyMedicareMatters.org is a valuable resource not only for family members and friends of people with Medicare, but also for individuals, community organizations and professionals,” said Donna Phillips, NCOA's Vice President of Member and Network

Services. In fact, the site features a special section for health care professionals with 2 levels of detail; 1 for those not accustomed to working with Medicare insurance and another for those who work with drug plans in their day-to-day operations. The Web site received high praise from users who responded to an onsite survey. Eighty percent indicated that they would recommend the site to a friend. While more than 1.5 million had visited the site by mid-March, visitors can continue to use both Web sites past the May 15, 2006 enrollment period.

What Are the Benefits? and What More Needs to Be Done?

My Medicare Matters™ has not only helped educate thousands of people about the new prescription drug coverage, but has assisted them in enrolling in plans that have saved them thousands of dollars on their prescriptions.

“It’s critical that people with Medicare fully understand their options so they can make their own informed decision about what’s right for them,” said Firman. “Prescription drug coverage can make a significant difference in the health and quality of life of anyone with Medicare. For those with limited income and resources, there should be no question that they should apply for the extra help and enroll in a plan.”

NCOA and ABC continue their emphasis on finding and assisting beneficiaries with limited resources take full advantage of this new coverage. For more information on ABC’s work, visit: www.AccessToBenefits.org. **MPM**

Wendy Zenker is the Director of Medicare Outreach for the National Council on the Aging (NCOA), located in Washington, DC.

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*The Access to Benefits Coalition was formed in March 2004 and is committed to helping low-income Medicare beneficiaries find the best combination of public and private prescription savings programs. Its members include over 100 national non-profit organizations and 55 local and State ABC Coalitions, involving over 800 community-based organizations that are helping Medicare beneficiaries on the frontlines. NCOA chairs the ABC Steering Committee, along with members from AARP, the Alzheimer’s Association, Easter Seals, and the National Alliance on Hispanic Health.

Letters

An Important Message for Providers Regarding Medicare Part D from the CMS Administrator, Dr. Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD

Prescribers are vital to the well being of their patients and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services is doing everything we can to streamline the new Part D coverage to make it easier for you to help your patients, while not infringing on the scarce clinical time you have with them. The following link will take you to a video that we hope explains what we are doing during the transition to help prescribers and their office staffs smooth the process of prior authorizations, exceptions and appeals. Go to our provider center at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/center/provider.asp> (go to Part D tools) and select the video. There are a number of other useful lists that we have assembled there to help ease the process of helping your patients with their new drug coverage.

CMS has a dedicated email for prescriber’s questions at PRIT@cms.hhs.gov, as well as a standing teleconference every Tuesday at 2 PM by calling 1-800-619-2457 Passcode: RBDML.

Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD

Office of the Administrator
Department of Health & Human Services
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Washington, DC

Correction

Although *Medicare Patient Management* makes every effort to ensure that its printed materials are as close to perfect as possible, occasionally typographical errors appear. We apologize for misspelling CMS Administrator Mark. B. McClellan’s last name in the Q&A Department of the March/April (Volume One • Number Two) issue of the journal.