

Senior Spring Swing Cancelled

Is there anyone reading this Newslines who has not been adversely affected by the ongoing economic stress and trials confronting our country? More than likely all our belts have been tightened and we have been challenged to make do with less. Our County Freeholders continue to work relentlessly to provide widespread services to their constituents while at the same time being fiscally responsible. Every County department has been affected by the need to rein in spending.

As a result, in order to assist our Freeholders, the Office on Aging has decided to cancel its

Annual Spring Swing that was scheduled for May, 2011. While we all enjoy a good time, it seemed to us inappropriate to expend money for a "party" when so many of us are in need of basic services such as food and transportation. We hope you will understand this difficult and disappointing decision and be supportive of our desire to continue the level of excellent service that has come to be associated with the Office on Aging.

Our hope is to resume this happy event when our economic picture is brighter and more sound.

2011 Senior Art Show

Attention all artists!

During the month of July, the Monmouth County Office on Aging will again be sponsoring a senior art show at the Library Headquarters in Manalapan. If you have any art show questions or are not already on our mailing list, please contact Joni Baron at 732-308-3770 extension 8919 and request that your name and address be added to the distribution list. It is anticipated that the application packet with the senior art show guidelines and entry form will be mailed out in March. And for anyone not familiar with the show, please go to our Web site at www.visitmonmouth.com/aging and click on the 2010 Senior Art Show tab to view last year's entries and artists. The talent we have in Monmouth County is extraordinary.



See you at the art show!

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THE DIVISION ON AGING, DISABILITIES AND VETERANS SERVICES

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www.visitmonmouth.com/aging

Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Medicare and Medicaid

*By Charles Clarkson, Esq.,
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(SMP) of New Jersey*

No one likes to think of themselves as being susceptible to health care scams and unethical practices; however, not considering the possibility results in exposure to wide spread fraud, waste, and abuse. Take, for example, the true story of a Medicare beneficiary admitted into a hospital for a routine procedure. Everything goes smoothly, and she returns home to recuperate. Ninety days later her Medicare Summary Notice arrives in the mail. The summary clearly states that "this is not a bill." The amount indicated was enormous. The beneficiary realized hospital stays were expensive, but her charges seemed over-the-top. Although it was not in her nature to complain, and she wasn't interested in making waves, curiosity reigned and she phoned the hospital to request an itemized invoice, something every hospital patient should insist on. Upon request hospitals have to produce an itemized statement. About a week or so later it arrived. Scrutinizing the statement, she noticed some extraordinary expenses, including sheets and towels, which are supposed to be included in the price of a double room, a mucus recovery system (a box of tissue for \$129), and a charge for a nursery crib. It had been over 40 years since the delivery of her youngest child. An unusual story? No, not really. Errors occur all the time. Double billing, charging twice for the same

service, and upcoding, assigning a medical billing code for a more expensive procedure are common occurrences. If you do not check your Medicare Summary Notice, it is a pretty safe bet that eventually you will be cheated.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, national health care expenditures topped \$2.5 trillion in 2009. In an effort to combat fraud, waste, and abuse and to preserve the integrity of Medicare, the Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) program was created.

SMP of New Jersey is a federally funded, statewide initiative operating under the auspices of Jewish Family and Vocational Service of Middlesex County. SMP provides education and outreach to Medicare / Medicaid beneficiaries; their families; and caregivers to help protect them from becoming victims of health care fraud, waste, and abuse.

SMP wants you to be a wise health care consumer and offers some simple steps you can take to protect yourself.

NEVER:

- give your Medicare/Medicaid number to someone you don't trust.
- give your Medicare/Medicaid number to anyone offering a "free" service.
- accept medical supplies or equipment from a door-to-door salesperson.
- provide information to someone

on the telephone claiming to be from Medicare. Medicare does not call beneficiaries unless you call them first.

- keep mail in your mailbox for more than one day. People steal personal information from mailboxes.

ALWAYS:

- review your Medicare Summary Notice.
- shred Medicare Summary Notices and other important documents before throwing them away.
- keep a calendar with your doctors' visits and medical tests. Compare your calendar to your Medicare Summary Notices.

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Family Medical Leave Act... Gives You Time

You've just brought your mother home from the hospital. She has a serious medical condition and lives alone. She will need some help in the home. Of course, you'll do what you can but you work and have to care for your family. Do you have options? If you would like to spend some more time with her, you might inquire into your eligibility for the Family Medical Leave Act. This benefit entitles covered employees of qualified employers to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave with job protection in a 12 month period to care for a family member (spouse, parent, child or the employee him/herself) with a serious medical illness. Note that this leave can be taken intermittently and not necessarily all at once. Job protection means that the covered employee must be returned to the same job position or to a comparable position after they return from leave. After the 12 week period expires, the employer has no obligation to reinstate the employee.

Employees of public agencies, local education providers and private-



sector employers, who employ at least 50 people for at least 20 weeks each year within a 75 mile radius, may be protected by this Act. Employees must have worked for the employer for at least 12 months and worked a minimum of 1250 hours in the previous 12 months. Generally, an employee is required to provide his employer with 30 days notice, but if the need for leave is unexpected the employee only needs

to notify the employer as soon as is possible. The employer is required to respond to a request for leave within 10 days and may request proof of the need for leave including medical documentation. This law also applies to the spouse, child or parent of an injured service member or a member of the National Guard or Reserves who is soon to be deployed. They may be entitled for up to 26 weeks in a 12 month period.

REMINDER: The Office on Aging sponsors monthly Caregiver support groups at the Marlboro and Neptune Senior Centers. If you are caring for an elderly loved one or friend and are feeling overwhelmed; come and relax, find resources and information from a supportive group of peers. The service is free of charge. Marlboro meets on the third Wednesday of each month and Neptune meets on the third Tuesday of each month from 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon. In addition to your individual issues, topics discussed, with a subject matter expert, will include Adult Day Care in March, Assisted Living in April and Advanced Directives in May. Call Colleen Smith 732-308-3770 x8780 to inquire.

Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Medicare and Medicaid *continued from page 1*

- count your pills. Short pilling is a problem. If you are short pilled, complain to your pharmacist.
- report possible fraud.

Not every mistake constitutes fraud; however, if you suspect fraud or abuse, the SMP of New Jersey is here to help. Call the SMP of New Jersey Hot Line, toll free at 877-SMP-4359 (877-767-

4359) or contact Jewish Family and Vocational Service of Middlesex County at 732-777-1940 and ask for the SMP office.



About Herpes Zoster (Shingles)

From the Website of the National Institutes of Health

Shingles is very common. Fifty percent of all Americans will have had shingles by the time they are 80. Shingles can occur in people of all ages, but it is most common in 60- to 80-year olds.

Shingles is a painful skin disease caused by a reactivation of the chickenpox virus. It is distinctive because it affects only one side of the body. The early signs of shingles usually develop in three stages: severe pain or tingling, possibly itchy rash, and blisters that look like chickenpox. The name shingles comes from the Latin word cingulum, which means "belt" or "girdle". The scientific name for the virus that causes shingles is varicella-zoster, combining the Latin word for "little pox" with the Greek word for "girdle". Another name for shingles is herpes zoster.

The virus that causes shingles is a herpes virus. Once you are infected with this kind of virus, it remains in your

body for life. It stays inactive until a period when your immunity is down. If you have had chickenpox, shingles is not contagious. Nothing will happen to you if you are exposed to someone who has shingles. If you have never had chickenpox, however, avoid contact with anyone who has shingles; the fluid from their open blisters is infectious. You will not get shingles, but you could get chickenpox if exposed. If you have not had chickenpox and come into contact with someone who has shingles, ask your physician if you should get a chickenpox vaccination. Unlike chickenpox, with shingles, the virus is NOT transmitted by someone breathing or coughing on you. You have to come into contact with the blister fluid itself. Once the blisters scab over, the contagious period is ended.

The pain of shingles can be debilitating. If it is severe and persists for months or years, it is called postherpetic neuralgia. Persistent pain is a common symptom in people over 60. Outbreaks

that start on the face or eyes can cause vision or hearing problems. Even permanent blindness can result if the cornea of the eye is affected. Bacterial infection of the open sores can lead to scarring. The burning waves of pain, loss of sleep, and interference with even basic life activities can cause serious depression. In patients with immune deficiency, the rash can be more extensive than usual and the illness can be complicated by pneumonia.

The good news is... In May 2006, the USDA approved a vaccine to prevent shingles in people age 60 and older, even if they have had shingles. The vaccine (Zostavax) is designed to boost the immune system and protect older adults from getting shingles later on. The vaccine is basically a stronger version of the chickenpox vaccine, which became available in 1995. Consult with your physician about whether the shingles vaccine would be advisable for you.



The New Board of Chosen Freeholders



Seated (left to right): John P. Curley, Deputy Director; Robert D. Clifton, Director; Lillian G. Burry
Standing (left to right): Amy A. Mallet, Thomas A. Arnone