

New Free Program to Help Medicare Beneficiaries Better Manage Their Health

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has launched a three-year pilot program to help people living with diabetes or heart failure. Called Medicare Health Support, the program provides free education and support services to select Medicare beneficiaries around the country, including 20,000 living in the Maryland and D.C. area.

Beneficiaries selected to participate in the program receive personalized information delivered by a team of health care experts. Through regular phone calls from a nurse familiar with the beneficiary's needs, participants receive reminders about health tests covered by Medicare, answers to questions about medication, advice about diet and exercise and general help understanding medical issues that may be confusing.

In addition, program participants receive regular mailings on topics including home safety, pain management, management of health records and general health tips. Medicare Health Support nurses are available phone 24 hours a day to help answer any questions.

"The goal of this unique pilot program is to help empower people to manage their own health," said Ben Leedle, CEO, American Healthways. "Our nurses help people better understand the directions from their doctors, and we help patients identify questions and concerns to address at their next physician visit."

The program is free and completely voluntary. Beneficiaries can choose to leave the program at any time, and it does not affect a person's Medicare benefits. Medicare Health Support is not intended to replace a doctor's care, advice or treatment plan.

The pilot program will run through 2008, and it includes diabetes and heart patients in nine parts of the United States. If the program is successful in both improving the health of Medicare beneficiaries and lowering costs, it may become available to all Medicare beneficiaries in the future.

Medicare is working with American Healthways to implement the program in the Baltimore and D.C. area. For more than 20 years, American Healthways has been working with hospitals, health plans and physicians to improve patient health and reduce the cost of care. Currently, American Healthways provides care support services to 1.5 million people nationwide.

For more information about Medicare Health Support, go to www.medicarehealthsupport.com or call 1-866-807-4487. For more information about American Healthways, visit www.americanhealthways.com.

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