

MEDICARE BASICS FOR CAREGIVERS

By
Judith S. Parnes
LCSW, CMC
Executive Director



Caregivers not yet enrolled in Medicare themselves, often need to learn the essentials of this government program as soon as they start caring for elderly parents.

First, a common point of confusion: the difference between Medicare and Medicaid. Medicare is the federal health INSURANCE plan that most Americans have paid into their entire work life. The basic Medicare program is not related to one's income or assets. Medicaid is the federal/state health subsidy program available only to those with low income and minimal assets. Some seniors are eligible for both programs.

Medicare Part A- is also called "Hospital Insurance." Part A is paid for by a portion of your Social Security Tax while employed. Generally, those 65 and over and getting Social Security automatically qualify for Medicare Parts A & B.

Part A is "free" when you qualify for Medicare. It covers inpatient hospital care, skilled nursing care, hospice care and home health services. Benefits in a skilled nursing facility are time limited and requires a prior three-day inpatient hospital stay.

Medicare Part B - is also called "Medical Insurance." Almost anyone who is 65 or older can enroll for Medicare Part B Medical Insurance by paying a monthly premium, in 2012 the cost is \$99.90 a month and is already deducted from the individual's Social Security check. It covers doctors' fees, outpatient hospital visits, outpatient therapy services, durable medical equipment and other services and supplies that Part A doesn't cover.

Medigap or Medicare Supplemental Insurance is additional insurance that covers the deductibles of Medicare A and B. This type of insurance is typically needed to limit out of pocket expenses. Blue Cross/Blue Shield, AARP and many private companies sell standard Medigap plans

Medicare Part C- a term not frequently used, is also called Medicare Advantage. It allows

you to choose to receive all your health care services through a provider organization, such as an HMO or PPO. As with many HMO programs the choice of physicians and facilities is limited. Some older adults choose a "Medicare Advantage" and not to remain in traditional Medicare A and B, so there would be no cost for an additional Medigap policy.

Medicare Part D- the newest component of Medicare, is the federal program for Prescription Drug Coverage. Even if you are very healthy when enrolling for Medicare, you should also consider Part D or another prescription plan as "insurance." You can't instantly receive Medicare Part D coverage if unfortunately you were to suddenly need it. Enrollment periods are annually from Nov. 15 - Dec. 31. Because benefits and costs vary greatly among different plans, discussion with your pharmacist would be a practical way to review options.

This article is the first in a series for caregivers. Our philosophy is that only by being educated consumers can we best care for loved ones.