

# News Release



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## AREA SENIORS LEARN HOW TO FIGHT MEDICARE FRAUD AND ABUSE

St. Petersburg -- Area seniors received some helpful tips today on how to protect themselves from Medicare fraud during a seminar sponsored by the Medicare Fraud Branch of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida (BCBSF).

The seminar was scheduled as President Clinton is targeting fraud and abuse as an important element of the government's plan to reduce Medicare costs. Health care fraud costs taxpayers approximately \$80 billion each year, according to estimates by the federal government.

"Although most health care providers are honest, senior citizens need to be aware of how some providers wrongly take advantage of unsuspecting Medicare beneficiaries," said Medicare Senior Medical Fraud Analyst Debra Fulton, RN, MSN. "To help fight fraud, BCBSF sponsors seminars designed to help Medicare beneficiaries detect scams."

In cooperation with the federal government in 1992, BCBSF's Medicare Fraud Branch assisted in investigations which resulted in recoveries in excess of \$10 million. The amount includes physicians who overbilled Medicare, civil monetary penalties and court-ordered restitution.

In Florida, popular Medicare scams include:

- o Telemarketers who identify themselves as Medicare employees and ask for beneficiaries' Medicare numbers;
- o Door-to-door solicitors who offer groceries and milk in exchange for a Medicare number;
- o Providers who bill for services not rendered and order unnecessary tests;
- o Weight loss clinics that use the diagnosis of depression for payment; and
- o Acupuncturists who bill their services as physical therapy.

Any Floridian can report Medicare fraud and abuse by calling 1-800-333-7586 toll free from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (EDT) Monday through Friday. To file a report in writing, letters should be sent to Medicare Fraud Branch, P.O. Box 45087, Jacksonville, FL, 32231-5087.

The seminar featured a signer for the hearing-impaired.