

Key Messages: Medicare Demonstration

- Medicare policies serve as reimbursement guidelines for the physician, not treatment policies. Decisions about the proper medical treatment for a Medicare beneficiary are made between a physician and patient.
- We encourage Medicare beneficiaries with suspected skin lesions that concern them to visit their physician right away. Medicare will pay for the initial physician visit.
- Medicare pays for the removal of benign or pre-malignant skin lesions when it is medically necessary for the patient to have them removed, based on medical research and scientific data from leading experts in the dermatology field. Since the policy was implemented in November 1996, Medicare has paid more than 90 percent of the claims submitted.
- Medicare is very concerned about the quality of health care that beneficiaries receive in Florida. It is our duty as the Part B carrier to safeguard the Medicare system in Florida, and the federal government has entrusted us to do so. It is also our responsibility to make sure that we cover only services for beneficiaries that are medically necessary and reasonable.
- Florida has been a leader among Medicare contractors in the United States in many areas, including identifying fraud, waste and abuse in the system through the Program Safeguards Division. In 1996, we saved the government approximately \$457 million through our efforts -- a return of almost \$25 for every dollar spent safeguarding the Medicare program. Our efforts to fight fraud in South Florida were recently recognized by President Bill Clinton as a part of the Operation Restore Trust program.
- In Florida, physicians were removing skin lesions from their patients at a rate 300 percent more than the national norm and 193 percent more than other Sunbelt states (per 1000 beneficiaries). In 1995, this service cost the Medicare program more than \$40 million in Florida alone. A policy was needed to provide guidelines for physicians to understand when Medicare would pay for the removal of skin lesions. The policy simply reinforces the good medicine that responsible physicians practice.
- We are concerned that dermatologists are scaring seniors and Medicare beneficiaries and misrepresenting the policy to them. As the Medicare Part B carrier, we take our responsibility to educate and protect beneficiaries seriously. Across the state we educate beneficiaries about Medicare coverage and explain their Medicare benefits accurately.
- For over a year, Medicare has invited Florida dermatologists to submit any evidence or information they have that would provide more criteria or new guidelines for coverage of skin lesion removal. To date they have not produced this documentation, but we are always willing to listen to them and review their data. Medicare implements coverage policies based on information, not on demonstrations.
- The physicians and senior citizens demonstrating today have a right to express their concerns in a public forum on public lands. BCBSF employees will treat all demonstrators with respect and honor their freedom of expression. If any beneficiaries have had a claim denied as a result of this policy or are concerned about the coverage policy, they may call the customer service line at 1-800-333-7586. Providers with questions may call 904-634-4994.