

Wisconsin Senior Medical Patrol Fraud Alert



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Senior Medicare Patrols (SMPs) empower and assist Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and caregivers to prevent, detect, and report health care fraud, errors, and abuse through outreach, counseling, and education.

Please feel free to share this publication with others who may benefit from its contents.

TO CONTACT WI SMP

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Does this sound familiar?

You've heard about someone, let's call him Mark, who answered a phone call and the person on the other end started to engage Mark in conversation. This caller seemed to take a great deal of interest in Mark and then turned the conversation to any aches or pains that Mark may be experiencing. The caller has the perfect solution – a brace for Mark that will solve all his issues. This caller is persuasive, and emphasizes that the brace will be a quick, efficient and convenient solution. And, of course, the brace is FREE. The caller then convinces Mark to just give the caller his Medicare number and he'll be all set.

Shortly afterwards the braces begin to arrive. Boxes and boxes. These boxes include different braces for various body parts and in several sizes, none of which Mark needs nor wants. At this point, Mark isn't even sure how to use the brace he was expecting and questions which is the right size. There is no one to call, no customer service. Medicare, though, is billed for every brace. And if Medicare declines the billing, Mark becomes responsible for the total cost, equating to thousands of dollars.

This is fraud. The Durable Medical Equipment (DME) business is plagued by it. Even in a time when COVID-19 scams are numerous, this one persists.

The scammers who commit fraud not only use the phone; they also appear in TV commercials. They're selling the ultimate treatment, and it's all FREE. The viewer, who is wanting some relief, calls the number on the screen and gives their Medicare number. The same scenario of boxes arriving unexpectedly ensues.

This is fraud. If you are on Medicare, you are the fraudsters' target.

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Fraud Alert

Companies are calling individuals and convincing them that they would benefit from a body brace. These scammers say it is free and that Medicare will cover all costs. They then obtain a patient's Medicare number, order excess amounts of Durable Medical Equipment and bill Medicare thousands of dollars.

When Medicare doesn't cover the claims, the patient then faces a huge bill and harassing phone calls for payment. Some of the companies are threatening people with noncompliance and loss of Medicare. Plus, the individual ends up with boxes of braces that don't fit and are not needed. And a real pain to deal with.

How do I Prevent Fraud?

- Don't pick up the phone.
- If you do pick up and don't recognize the caller, always hang up! It may seem rude, but it's the best tactic you can use in these harassing phone situations.
- Protect your Medicare number like it's a credit card.
- Don't order medical supplies from a TV commercial or from an unfamiliar caller/company.

Keep in Mind

- Durable Medical Equipment is marketed by phone calls, TV commercials and face-to-face meetings.
- These scammers are trained to entice you to place an order and they are quite persuasive.
- Once they get your Medicare number, the scam is in motion.
- ONLY YOUR DOCTOR CAN PRESCRIBE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT.

What to Do

- If you have given out your Medicare number to a person whom you suspect of having fraudulent intent, contact SMP. We can discuss with you some steps you can take.
- If you do think that you would benefit from some type of medical equipment, a back brace, etc., **speak directly with your health care professional.** They will provide you with local DME specialists who will likely measure you to ensure that your equipment fits you properly and they will show you how to properly wear the equipment.
- These professionals and specialists can also answer honestly any questions as to whether Medicare will cover the equipment and what out of pocket costs you might incur.

Wisconsin SMP is available for outreach events, educational sessions for beneficiaries, caregivers and professionals, workshops and exhibits at events.
Please contact us at smp-wi@gwaar.org for more information



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