Asclepios

Your Weekly Medicare Consumer Advocacy Update

ACT NOW: Tell Congress to Save Lives and Money by Taking the Profiteering Out of Medicare

September 22, 2005 • Volume 5, Issue 38

Hurricane Katrina showed Americans the stark racial and economic divide in the Gulf Coast. The failure of government to protect its citizenry played out in Americans’ living rooms, and the nation responded with both compassion and anger.

Thankfully the national anger over the government’s inept response is now forcing a scramble by the Bush Administration to avoid a second unnatural disaster as Hurricane Rita approaches the Texas coast.

Debate will continue over the responsibility of ideologues for lives unnecessarily lost in Louisiana. These ideologues have consistently refused to recognize that government must be at the ready to play a role in the common good.

Yet, for some, even the horror of needless death in the waters of a great American city did not sound an alarm. For some members of the U.S. government, human life is less important than their ideological agenda.

Consider this comment from Baton Rouge’s own Republican Congressman Richard Baker in the days after the destruction of New Orleans: “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did.”

A remarkable comment in the month that rendered more Americans homeless than at any time, quite possibly, since the Civil War.

The executive branch of the federal government was not far behind in pushing sought after “reforms.” In the wake of Katrina, President Bush suspended the laws that require federal contractors to pay workers a prevailing wage, a way to allow companies receiving no-bid contracts to maximize profits as they rebuild in the wake of Katrina.

Even New York’s Republican mayor took to reminding the president how important the morale and quality of the workforce was in rebuilding New York’s economy after the September 11th terrorist attacks.

For good measure Medicare too was tossed up by members of Congress as an ideological wedge in the post-Katrina posturing.
During this week, when our federal leaders were arguing about the lack of health care for Americans displaced by Katrina, some Congressional luminaries proposed scuttling the Medicare drug benefit to pay for hurricane relief.

In the words of Representative Lynn Westmoreland, Republican of Georgia, “Most seniors are not going to know what to do with [the Medicare drug benefit] anyway.”

Stripping needy Americans of prescription drugs is not the answer to the needs of a million Americans displaced by natural disasters.

People with Medicare desperately need prescription drug coverage. However flawed, the drug benefit could assist millions of low-income people get the medicine they need to enhance and protect their lives.

But a fiscally responsible government should be looking carefully at the windfall profiteering that will flow to insurers and drug companies from the structure of the new Medicare drug benefit.

Comedians are already warning people with Medicare to get bigger mailboxes—there soon will be a blizzard of promotions in the mail and on the airwaves as scores of companies join the gold rush to administer private Medicare drug plans. And the drug benefit is projected to increase drug maker profits by some $139 billion. If Medicare were allowed to negotiate drug prices—just like the Department of Defense and Department of Veteran’s Affairs—the federal government could save billions.

If the drug benefit were designed like Medicare with the government administering the benefit directly, the federal government could save billions more.

That benefit, not on the table for 2006, would assure taxpayers, and the 43 million Americans with Medicare that a dollar’s worth of medicine will be bought with each government dollar paid.

A smarter government could be fiscally responsible, humane and efficient if it placed the public interest over the private interests that stand to gain so much with the new drug benefit.

A true Medicare drug benefit would be one that, to paraphrase Congressman Westmoreland, older adults would know what to do with.

Click here to send an e-mail message or letter to your representatives in Congress asking them to take the profiteering out of Medicare Part D benefit we have today, to ensure the best drug benefit for people with Medicare.

Medical Record