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RI ARA

*"Fighting for the future of our members.
NOW, more than ever!!!!"*

*Affiliated with the Rhode Island AFL-CIO
RI ARA HealthLink Wellness*

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Very Important Social Security Information: Changes in Certain Services



To meet the increasing demands for their service, Social Security needs to make changes to how they provide some services to our customers.

To protect the integrity of the Social Security number and prevent fraud, they will discontinue providing Social Security number printouts effective August 1, 2014. If you need proof of your Social Security number and you do not have your Social Security card, you will need to request a replacement Social Security card by completing the *Application for a Social Security Card (Form SS-5)* and providing the required documentation.

Also, effective October 1, 2014, Social Security will stop providing benefit verification letters in our offices. You will still be able to get an instant letter online with a personal

mySocial Security account or you may call them at toll-free 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) to request a letter by mail.

See steps below or requesting a replacement Social Security card or obtaining your benefit verification letter. They also encourage you to visit www.socialsecurity.gov to learn about the many convenient online services available to you.

How to get replacement Social Security Cards

Your Social Security card is your legal proof of your Social Security number. If you need proof of your number, and you can't find your card, you will need a replacement card. To get a replacement card, you must complete an Application for a Social Security Card (Form SS-5), which you can find online at www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber. You also will need documents proving your identity, age and citizenship or lawful immigration status.

In most cases, you can take, or mail, your completed application and original documents to any Social Security office. Go to www.socialsecurity.gov/locator to find the Social Security office or Social Security Card Center that serves your area. After processing, they will return your documents to you.

How to get benefit verification letters

If you need proof of your Social Security or Supplemental Security Income benefits, you can get a benefit verification letter online instantly through a *mySocial Security* account. To create an account, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount. With *mySocial Security*, you can easily view, print or save an official letter that includes proof of your:

- ◆ Benefit amount and type;
- ◆ Medicare start date and withholding amount (if applicable); and
- ◆ Age.

If you are unable to go online, you can call our toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0775) to request your letter be mailed to you. You also can use your annual cost-of-living adjustment notice or SSA Form 1099 as proof of income from Social Security.

For more information

A wealth of information and online service options are available on our website at www.socialsecurity.gov. Or you can call our toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778), and ask for helpful publications, such as:

- ◆ How To Create An Online Account (Publication No. 05-10540),
- ◆ Your Social Security Number And card (Publication No. 05-10002); and
- ◆ What You Can Do Online (Publication No. 05-10121).

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
HEARING ON**

“Current Hospital Issues in the Medicare Program”

MAY 20, 2014

ALLIANCE FOR RETIRED AMERICANS,

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The Alliance for Retired Americans appreciates the opportunity to submit comments to the Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Health for the hearing entitled “Current Hospital Issues in the Medicare Program,” which focused on Medicare’s two midnight rule. The Alliance is very concerned about the growing practice of hospitals keeping patients under “observation status”, rather than admitting them as inpatients. We are hearing from more and more of our members who are being affected by the policy.

Founded in 2001, the Alliance is a grassroots organization representing more than 4 million retirees and seniors nationwide. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the Alliance and its 33 state chapters work to advance public policy that strengthens the health and economic security of older Americans by teaching seniors how to make a difference through activism.

Observation status is a designation used by hospitals to bill Medicare. As a result of this designation, more and more seniors are experiencing difficulties getting Medicare coverage for admission to skilled nursing facility (SNF), along with other billing issues. In fact, Medicare estimates show that 1.6 million seniors were placed in “observation status” during a hospital stay in 2011. This is a 69 percent increase over the previous 5 years.

While Medicare manuals suggest hospitals may hold individuals up to 24 hours (and in some exceptional circumstances up to 48 hours) in “observation status” prior to being admitted, many seniors that spend numerous days in the hospital are deemed to be in “observation status.” Care provided to patients who are placed in “observation status” is billed as outpatient rather than inpatient. This means that patients are responsible for the 20 percent copay. Also, patients are being billed for medications they take routinely and which are not a result of the hospital visit.

The most significant consequence is for seniors who upon discharge from the hospital require care at a skilled nursing facility. If these Medicare beneficiaries were deemed to be outpatients or in “observation status”, they do not meet the three-day inpatient stay requirement necessary to receive Part A coverage for post-hospital care at a skilled nursing facility. These individuals find themselves having to cough up thousands of dollars for their care at these facilities or go without needed care altogether. Many seniors are having to mortgage their homes or ask their loved ones for money to cover their medical bills. While Medicare beneficiaries may try to appeal Medicare’s decision, the appeals process is long and tedious with unknown outcomes, and this usually occurs after beneficiaries have spent considerably out of pocket to get care.

We are also hearing that in many states the state employees health care fund is paying for retired state employees who find themselves in “observation status.” This is placing a burden on the coffers of many state employees health funds. States should not have to pay the cost of what is clearly a covered service under the Medicare program.

Medicare beneficiaries who have played by the rules and contributed their entire working lives to the program so that they can have peace of mind and be covered for medically necessary services should not find themselves incurring unexpected costs and having to hire attorneys to get the coverage they already paid for.

One solution that would solve this situation is for Congress to pass the bipartisan bill Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act of 2013, S.569 and H.R. 1179, introduced by Senators Sherrod Brown and Susan Collins and Representatives Joe Courtney and Tom Latham, which would amend Medicare law to count a beneficiary’s time spent in the hospital on “observation status” towards the three-day hospital stay requirement for skilled nursing care. The measure would also establish a 90-day appeal period following passage for those that have a qualifying hospital stay and have been denied skilled nursing care after January 1, 2013.

The Alliance for Retired Americans is pleased to support the Improving Access to Medicare Coverage Act and urges its speedy adoption by Congress.

RI ARA HealthLink Wellness

Seniors with Pneumonia Lower Death Risk Taking Azithromycin; Slight Chance of Heart Attack

Study suggests the protection from pneumonia outweighs the heart attack risk.

In a study that included nearly 65,000 senior patients – age 65 and older - hospitalized with pneumonia, treatment that included azithromycin compared with other antibiotics was associated with a significantly lower risk of death and a slightly increased risk of heart attack, according to a study in the June 4 issue of *JAMA*.

Pneumonia and influenza together are the eighth leading cause of death and the leading causes of infectious death in the United States.

The final analysis included 31,863 patients who received azithromycin and 31,863 matched patients who did not, but some other guideline-concordant therapy.

The researchers found that 90-day mortality was significantly lower in those who received azithromycin (17.4 percent, vs 22.3 percent). There was also an increased odds of heart attack (5.1 percent vs 4.4 percent), but not any cardiac event (43.0 percent vs 42.7 percent), cardiac arrhythmias (25.8 percent vs 26.0 percent), or heart failure (26.3 percent vs 26.2 percent)...[Read the full story](#)

Medicare Releases First Update of Hospital Charge Data; FDA Makes Health Datasets Available

**Data can help improve care coordination and health outcomes for Medicare patients;
the Food and Drug Administration will also introduce a new open data initiative at Datapalooza**

The first annual update to the Medicare hospital charge data - information comparing the average amount a hospital bills for services that may be provided in connection with a similar inpatient stay or outpatient visit – is being released today by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. CMS is also releasing a suite of other data products and tools aimed to increase transparency about Medicare payments.

It is part of a broader release of new data and information on new initiatives being introduced by the Department of Health and Human Services at the annual Health Datapalooza conference in Washington, D.C. More than 2,000 entrepreneurs, investors, data scientists, researchers, policy experts, government employees and others are in attendance...[Read More](#)



Medicare Can Save Quick \$5 Billion by Better Part D Choice for Low-Income Seniors

**Researchers find simple way to strengthen Medicare drug program for
low-income seniors and save government billions of dollars**

A \$5 billion dollar savings for Medicare in the first year of making a simple and logical policy change sounds great to most seniors who worry about the financial pressure on their health care insurance program. Well, it's possible, according to a new study that suggests changing the way Part D plans are selected for low-income beneficiaries eligible for a government subsidy.

The results of the new research from the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health and funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), will be published in the June issue of the journal *Health Affairs*.

Medicare Part D provides assistance to beneficiaries below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. In 2013, an estimated 10 million beneficiaries received subsidies, and 75 percent of the total Part D federal spending of \$60 billion is for low-income enrollees.

Since 2006, the government has randomly assigned low-income enrollees to stand-alone Part D plans, based upon the region in which they live...[Read More](#)



Vitamin D with Calcium May Prevent Bone Fractures for High-Risk Seniors

By Glenda Fauntleroy, HBNS Contributing Writer

Research Source: The Cochrane Library



For seniors over the age of 65, taking a daily supplement of vitamin D with calcium—but not vitamin D alone—can offer some protection against the risk of common bone fractures, according to an updated review from *The Cochrane Library*.

Broken bones of the hip, wrist, or spine due to osteoporosis or low bone mass affect about 52 million Americans, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation. About one in two women and one in four men age 50 and older will break a bone due to their declining bone health.

Vitamin D has been proven essential for maintaining strong bone health. As people age, they tend to get less vitamin D from natural sources such as sunlight or foods such as fish and milk. Supplements are often needed to restore the body's optimal levels...[Read More](#)

Social Networks Usually Linked to Better Health for Older Adults, Studies Find

Special edition of *Health Psychology* packed with studies of senior citizens and their relationships

Having regular positive interactions with family and friends and being involved in several different social networks can help older adults be healthier, according to numerous new research reports to be published by the American Psychological Association this month. However, negative social interactions can present health risks.

“Close connections with others are likely to promote but can also sometimes detract from good health by shaping daily behavior that directly affects physical health,” said Lynn M. Martire, PhD, of The Pennsylvania State University.

Martire and Melissa M. Franks, PhD, of Purdue University, were guest editors for a special June issue of APA's *Health Psychology*.

“In some cases, the behavior may have to do with physical activity and in others, it might be related to diet or managing a chronic disease, such as diabetes,” Martire added.

The influence of social relationships on mortality risk is comparable to that of smoking and alcohol consumption, according to previous research. Many questions remain, however, such as how social networks come about and the nature of the relationships, Martire and Franks point out in “[The Role of Social Networks in Adult Health: Introduction to the Special Issue \(PDF, 56KB\)](#).” ...[Read More](#)



Spanish Friday Alert now Available

The *Friday Alert* will now be available each week in Spanish! To see last week's *Alerta Semanal*, go to <http://tinyurl.com/mq7gpry>. For the Alliance's Spanish language page, which includes fact sheets and other translated documents from the main site, go to <http://tinyurl.com/nllcz6n>. More outreach from the Alliance to the Hispanic elder community will be coming in the next few months.

The New England ARA state affiliates are actively pursuing these Petitions.

House Concurrent Resolution 67 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 26 to get power doors installed in Post Offices and other federal buildings.

Get The Message Out:

SIGN THE PETITION!!!!

Elimination of the Unfair GPO and WEP Provisions of the Social Security Act to make sure the Congress of the United States enacts legislation, HR 3118 & S 896

Get The Message Out:

SIGN THE PETITION!!!!

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