

Medicare News

Five Questions To Ask Your Physician About Medicare Part D

(NAPSA)—Asking your doctor the right questions about your Medicare plan may lead to savings and better coverage. It's estimated that over 43 million Americans are eligible for the Medicare Part D prescription drug plan and millions more—including caregivers or relatives of a senior, and health care professionals—are impacted.

One way that patients can try to get the most out of their coverage benefits is by receiving the most cost-effective medications. Health care professionals can help patients and their caregivers identify ways to save costs by reviewing individual health plan information.

One source of accurate information for doctors and patients is through electronic resources such as Epocrates' mobile or Web-based applications. Here are five suggested questions for patients to ask their doctor to start a discussion about drug coverage:

1. Are my medications covered by Medicare? Doctors can help patients get the most out of their Medicare plans by prescribing "on formulary"—that means selecting a drug that is covered by the patient's Medicare Part D plan. Ask your doctor to review your health plan coverage and ensure that your new or current medications are covered. Patients can also independently research reimbursement options, coverage gaps or mail-order prescription service programs.

2. How can I save money on my medications? Physicians can have immediate access to their



Your doctor can help you better understand the Medicare Part D program to save you money and maximize coverage benefits.

patient's individual health plan information while in the exam room with Epocrates' free drug and formulary reference. Patients can ask the doctor to check for generic drugs or lower-priced brand-name drugs available to treat their condition.

3. Are there any changes to my health plan coverage in 2007? In each state, there are multiple Medicare health plan options. They all differ in terms of which drugs are covered and how much they cost. By updating and maintaining all of the Medicare plan information, Epocrates provides physicians immediate answers to patient questions, which allows more time to focus on patient care. By routinely checking on plan updates, patients can proactively identify changes to their coverage and prevent unforeseen cost increases.

4. Do my medications require prior authorization? Some medications require prior

authorization, meaning that physicians need to verify with the health plan that they have already considered or tried other courses of therapy. Physicians and their staff can check for these insurance needs before the patient leaves the exam room and follow the necessary protocols immediately. Asking this question can prevent a patient from arriving at the pharmacy to find the prescription cannot be filled, incurring a delay in treatment.

5. Should I be concerned about drug interactions? Patients should create a list of their medications, including prescription, over-the-counter and herbal therapies, and bring it to every clinical appointment. Using a drug interaction tool, physicians can easily check for potential adverse reactions—severe or common—between multiple medications and alternative therapies. Consumers can also ask pharmacists or nurses to review their medication list, as many other health care professionals are now using convenient electronic references.

For additional information about Medicare Part D plans, patients can visit helpful sites such as the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (www.cms.hhs.gov/) or AARP (www.aarp.org). Health care professionals can visit Epocrates (www.epocrates.com) to create a free account and download Medicare formularies to their mobile device or access the program from any Internet-connected computer.