

COVID-19: Scammers working overtime to steal Medicare numbers during pandemic

Wednesday, July 23, 2020

by Anne Fredrickson, MGS, MHA

With the emergence of COVID-19 and all the terrible repercussions related to the pandemic, you might think that scammers would take a break. But that has not been the case.

The Senior Medicare Patrol Project (SMP) continues to see scams, fraud and abuse in the Medicare program. Early on in the pandemic, we knew that criminals were working quickly behind the scenes to find every opportunity they could to take advantage of some of our most vulnerable citizens – our Medicare beneficiaries – and they did!

We have heard from beneficiaries around the county who were contacted by scammers trying to get them to provide their Medicare number for a supposed new vaccine that will cure COVID-19. Other reported schemes include a fake online screening process for COVID-19 and pop-up testing sites (that are not legitimate testing operations) where seniors and others drive up, provide their Medicare number, and are billed – not for a COVID-19 test – but for other Medicare services not received.

Scammers may contact seniors through the Internet or by text or telephone, and request that they provide their Medicare number in exchange for COVID-19-related services. Additionally, pop-up ads on the Internet and Facebook claim seniors can receive assistance in finding the “right” provider for COVID-19 care. This is in exchange, of course, for providing the beneficiary’s Medicare number and/or personal identity information.

We have even heard of situations where Medicare beneficiaries tested positive for COVID-19, and were then billed for 100 days in a skilled nursing facility, when in fact they were simply put in quarantine.

At SMP, we are working hard to dispel the myths and scams related to COVID-19. It’s hard enough to experience the terrible physical and emotional consequences of being sick from the virus or having to quarantine away from friends and family, without suffering additional financial loss and stress from criminals.

If you think you have become a victim of fraud or abuse or have experienced a scam related to the COVID-19 virus or any other Medicare scam, please contact MT SMP at 1-800-551-3191.