

Medicare Maladies

A Series that Exposes the Dangerous Elements of the Medicare Bill currently in Committee

MM #35: As If Having Cancer Isn't Bad Enough

Government officials are cutting federal money for cancer drugs as a way to control costs for a possible universal drug entitlement in Medicare, some doctors say.

The Hill newspaper, which covers Congress, reports that some oncology groups are worried by recent moves from the Bush administration and Congress to cut Medicare payments for cancer drugs. According to the paper's Aug. 13 issue, a member of one group, U.S. Oncology, wrote an e-mail claiming the moves are intended to use federal funds for "more politically expedient and visible uses" such as prescription drugs.

Medicare doesn't pay for most prescription drugs but does cover some treatments such as chemotherapy. In June, lawmakers approved separate bills to expand drug coverage to all Medicare patients and are now working on one compromise bill to send to President Bush.

If Bush signs the bill, cutting funds from other Medicare benefits to pay for prescription drugs could be a standard procedure, Heritage Foundation health-care expert Robert Moffit says. But it doesn't have to be this way. Moffit suggests lawmakers should just scrap the Medicare drug entitlement entirely. Instead, they should speed up reforms based on the successful Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). The program offers patient choice (and prescription drugs) to 9 million federal employees and retirees.

You can read lots more about FEHBP and Medicare reform at heritage.org.

For more information or to receive an e-mail version of "Medicare Maladies," contact medicaremaladies@heritage.org or call Heritage Media Services at (202) 675-1761.

("Medicare Maladies" is a regular feature, launched 7/14/03, from The Heritage Foundation. Sad to say, there's another malady coming your way tomorrow. Daily "maladies" are also available on heritage.org.)