

Medicare Maladies

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

MM #44: The Sledgehammer and The Fly

Imagine you and a friend are sitting in your house one day when a fly enters the room.

It buzzes around your head and you swat at it, but the fly doesn't go away. Your friend offers to help. "Sure," you say.

He then pulls out a sledgehammer and starts swinging. He smashes your furniture to bits. He makes holes in the walls. He even misses your head a couple times as the fly zips around.

Your friend kills the fly, eventually. But not before destroying your entire house.

This is what senators are doing by proposing to make prescription drugs an entitlement for all Medicare patients: Despite their good intentions, they're taking a sledgehammer to policy problem that really needs a rolled-up magazine.

Currently, 78 percent of all seniors already have drug coverage, mostly through private plans or retiree insurance coverage, according the congressional Joint Economic Committee. But instead of offering drug coverage to the 22 percent who need it, senators offer it to everyone.

It's a nice gesture. But, like the sledgehammer as fly-swatter, major damage can be done with it: Around 4 million seniors would lose their private drug coverage be forced into Medicare if the Senate plan becomes law, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Then there's the cost: \$432 billion in the first 10 years alone, the budget office says.

The Heritage Foundation knows there are better ways to make prescription drugs more affordable for seniors. Read more about them 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.)