

Medicare Maladies

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

MM #50: How Medicare Forces Your M.D. To Need A J.D.

Future doctors and other health-care providers should consider earning law degrees along with their medical and professional degrees. They'll probably need them to defend themselves in court if Congress doesn't change Medicare law in a fundamental way.

There are tens of thousands of pages of Medicare rules, policies, regulations and related forms—and the proposed prescription drug entitlement, already a complicated mess, will just increase that figure. That means health-care providers will spend even more time on paperwork, not patient work, each day.

As Heritage Foundation legal expert Paul Rosenzweig points out, doctors especially can suffer from this burden of regulations. Take John Kiraly. The California oncologist spent more than 2 ½ years and \$10,000 in legal fees fighting a government audit that mistakenly claimed he overcharged Medicare by more than \$58,000. Dr. Carol Vargo of Montana fought the federal government for five years because of a Medicare billing mishap. During that time, she had more than \$300,000 in legal bills—and a blood clot in her lungs that her doctors attributed to stress.

Medicare has helped millions of seniors. But Medicare also has hurt many doctors who are helping people in it. The recently-passed House Medicare bill makes some progress in reducing the regulatory burden on them. But only with real reform will there be real relief.

Read more Medicare research 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.)