

Medicare Maladies

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

MM #62: There's No Happy Ending Here

Here's a fairy-tale that some Washington lawmakers believe will come true.

Once upon a time, a Capitol Hill committee presented President Bush with a bill that would give senior citizens across America the prescription drugs they need at low prices.

Bush signed it, the seniors got their drugs cheaply and everyone lived happily ever after.

Not quite, says tax expert John O. Fox. The reality is this: Because the proposal the committee is working on gives something to everyone, no matter how wealthy you may be, there will be an imbalance. For example, seniors living at the poverty level (about \$8,980 for a single person in 2003), could still pay nearly \$2,000 of their drug costs under a House version of the bill. Considering seniors spend about \$2,300 a year on prescriptions, Congress isn't offering them much help, Fox writes.

"Think of it this way," Fox writes in an Oct. 12 essay for *The Washington Post*. "If your prescription calls for four pills a day, and you can afford only one, are you really better off if the government helps you buy only one or two more? It's like giving a driver stranded in the desert enough gas to get halfway out."

As a remedy, Fox suggests something that health-care experts from The Heritage Foundation also have recommended: Target the seniors who really need the help instead of everyone. It will be more effective and prevent this fairy tale from becoming a nightmare.

Read how to offer prescription drugs through Medicare the right way 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.)