

Medicare Maladies

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

MM #66: “No, Do Harm First”

On Day One of medical school, students learn a phrase that’s been taught for thousands of years: “First, do no harm.”

But lawmakers seemed to have mixed it up as they work on proposals that would offer prescription drugs as a Medicare entitlement. If the bills become law, the creed will be: “No, do harm first.”

Right now, if President Bush signs the proposals, about 4 million seniors could lose the private prescription drug coverage they already have and be forced into an inferior government-run program, according to research from the Congressional Budget Office and Kenneth Thorpe, a former health-care adviser to President Clinton and health policy professor at Emory University.

This fact isn’t lost on Stan Hinden. The retirement columnist for *The Washington Post* examined the impact of both bills and concluded that seniors would get a raw deal instead of a helping hand from the government. “The disappointment, I expect, would be felt most keenly by retirees who had been satisfied with their employer’s drug plans,” Hinden wrote in an Oct. 19 column. “They will say: ‘I like what I had. Why did you have to mess it up?’”

Hinden even cited the works of Heritage Foundation experts Derek Hunter and Lanhee Chen, who also say that the bills will harm more seniors than help.

So what should lawmakers do first? Scrapping the drug provisions would be a good start.

Read more about how to reform 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.)