

Medicare Maladies

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

MM #83: Why Test Something That Already Works?

That's something people should ask Congress as it puts the finishing touches to a proposal that would offer prescription drug coverage to all Medicare patients.

One of the tougher issues for lawmakers has been whether to give seniors the right to choose better private health options. Under an agreement reached Nov. 12 by House and Senate leaders, the secretary of health and human services would designate four metropolitan areas and one region of the country for a three-year test of this approach, *The New York Times* reported. "The secretary could extend the test for another three years, after which it would end unless Congress intervened," the *Times* said.

A pilot program is unnecessary. The federal government already has tested a national consumer-choice, competition-based approach for 43 years.

It's called the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program, or FEHBP. It serves more than 8 million federal workers and retirees, including members of Congress. That patient pool is about the same as the combined populations of Oregon, Kansas, Maine and West Virginia. FEHBP already offers at least 12 health plans in all 50 states and every plan offers prescription drugs.

Why, you may ask, would members of Congress insist on "testing" the competition feature their own plan has relied on to provide superior coverage at reasonable costs before making it available to our seniors? Because they aren't testing anything to do with health care here. They are testing the boundaries of common sense. Read more about FEHBP 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.)