



# Medicare: Issue of the Day

January 9, 2004

## *BETTER BENEFITS – MORE CHOICES*

*Good News about the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003!*

### Coverage for Cardiovascular Screening:

- ✧ Beginning in 2005, Medicare will provide coverage of cardiovascular screening tests. This benefit provides a blood test for the early detection of cardiovascular disease or elevated risk of cardiovascular disease by testing cholesterol levels and other lipid or triglyceride levels. Pending recommendations of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and approval by the Secretary, additional indications may be added in the future.
- ✧ This new benefit will help at-risk Medicare beneficiaries find out about their condition much earlier and help them to treat and manage it so far fewer health consequences result for **millions of Americans**. The American Heart Association estimates that in 2001 over 64 million Americans had one or more forms of cardiovascular disease, including:
  - High blood pressure – 50 million;
  - Coronary heart disease – over 13 million; and
  - Stroke – nearly 5 million.
- ✧ **This new screening benefit can save lives.** Cardiovascular disease claimed 38.5 percent of all deaths in 2001, or 1 out of every 2.6. Heart disease and stroke are the first and third leading causes of death in the U.S.
- ✧ **Cardiovascular screening also will improve quality of life by treating the condition earlier, before it results in more severe health problems.** In 2003 alone, 1.1 million Americans will have a heart attack. Cardiovascular diseases cost the U.S. more than \$300 billion each year. From 1979 to 2001 the number of Americans discharged from short-stay hospital visits with cardiovascular disease listed as the primary diagnosis increased by 27 percent, making it the highest disease category among hospital discharges. Also in 2001, there were over 71 million physician visits, nearly 6 million hospital outpatient visits, and 4 million emergency room visits due to cardiovascular disease.
- ✧ **Helping those who need it most:** the cardiovascular disease screening does not have a deductible or co-pays, so beneficiaries do not incur any cost. This provides additional incentive to for those with limited resources who might not otherwise access these benefits.