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# OIG NEWS

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For Immediate Release  
March 3, 2003

## **HHS OIG ALERTS MEDICARE SUPPLIERS, BENEFICIARIES ABOUT PROHIBITED TELEMARKETING CALLS**

HHS Inspector General Janet Rehnquist today alerted durable medical equipment (DME) suppliers and consumers about improper telemarketing practices targeted at Medicare beneficiaries.

Medicare law prohibits DME suppliers from making – or hiring outside firms to make – unsolicited telephone calls to Medicare beneficiaries about the furnishing of Medicare-covered items, except in three specific situations (which are outlined in the OIG special fraud alert at <http://oig.hhs.gov/fraud/docs/alertsandbulletins/telemarketingdme.pdf>.) Despite this clear prohibition, some DME firms are hiring independent marketing firms to make prohibited marketing phone calls.

“Simply put, DME suppliers cannot do indirectly what they are prohibited from doing directly. Whether the prohibited calls are made directly by the DME supplier or by another party on the DME supplier’s behalf, these calls are prohibited under federal law,” IG Rehnquist said. DME is reusable medical equipment ordered by a physician for use in the home, such as walkers, wheelchairs or hospital beds.

“This law helps ensure that Medicare beneficiaries aren’t pressured into buying items they neither need nor want and that taxpayers and beneficiaries are not stuck paying the tab for unnecessary items. We are determined to investigate reports we receive about such practices and hold violators accountable,” Rehnquist said.

More generally, Rehnquist added that consumers should always be careful about giving sensitive personal information – such as one’s Social Security number, Medicare number or personal medical information – to any telemarketers who claim to be providing Medicare items or services.

If you have information about DME suppliers or telemarketers engaging in any of the activities described above, contact the HHS OIG’s Fraud Hotline at 1-800-447-8477.

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