



**Senior
Medicare
Patrol
Alert**

**IF IT SEEMS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE ...
Enticing promises of “free” wheelchairs or scooters
may be Medicare fraud that will cost you plenty**

Q. When is a “good deal” on a wheelchair or scooter not a good deal?

A. When it’s a Medicare fraud that leaves you stuck in a chair that’s not medically needed, possibly paying a big deductible and fattening the wallets of dealers making record profits from hard-earned tax dollars.

The numbers tell a story

Medicare payments for power wheelchairs and scooters came to \$299 million in 1999. By 2003, that total mushroomed to over \$1 billion. That is, sales more than tripled in four years. Some of this large increase means new hope for people previously unable to get around. Some is clearly fraud.

Ways the Con Works

- *Some dealers offer a “free” wheelchair or scooter to get a patient’s Medicare number. Once the crooks get your number it can appear on fraudulent bills from across the country.**
- *Some dealers pay doctors to say chairs are medically needed (when they’re not), transfer patients to far-off doctors offices or forge the needed medical forms.**
- *Some dealers charge Medicare for an expensive chair then deliver a cheaper one (or sometimes none at all).**

Medically needed?

Of course, the technology of today's power wheelchairs and scooters can dramatically change the lives of people who otherwise would be confined to a bed or chair. And everyone on Medicare who really needs this medical equipment should get it.

But much of the growth in Medicare costs for these items has been a fraud. Not only can these scams rob patients of vital exercise and cost taxpayers millions of dollars, they also ensnare unsuspecting seniors in a web of deceit and crime. What is the government doing?

The federal government is taking action. The Office of Inspector General is conducting investigations around the country and crooked dealers are being fined and going to jail. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is changing rules to keep some questionable dealers out of Medicare and is improving the medical approval process.

What can you do?

The best defense against this and other Medicare fraud, though, is an alert public. So how can you protect yourself?

✓First and foremost, always rely on your personal doctor to recommend all medical services and equipment for you.

✓Beware of pressure or scare tactics to sell you medical equipment or supplies.

✓Never give your Medicare or Medicaid number to strangers even for a "free" service or benefit. They do not need your number if the service is truly free.

✓Never allow anyone to have you contact your doctor requesting a service or product you do not need.

✓Beware of unsolicited sales pitches and offers of any kind be they from a live salesperson, the phone, TV, radio, the internet or anywhere else.

✓Never allow anyone to see your medical or prescription records without your doctor's or pharmacist's approval.

✓Never believe anyone who says they are from Medicare or any federal agency trying to sell you something. Neither the government nor Medicare endorses products or services for anyone.

✓If you have called your health care provider or Medicare insurance contact and continue to have questions see below:

**call your State Senior Medicare Patrol contact listed at
http://www.aoa.gov/smp/grantee/grantee_state.asp**