JUST HANG UP!

You are sitting at home relaxing and the phone rings. The number on caller ID doesn’t look familiar, but you answer it anyway. The caller says that since you have Medicare, you can get a free knee or back brace or some type of medication for your health problem. All you need to do is give the caller a little information. What do you do? **JUST HANG UP!**

Medicare rules do not permit enrolled providers or suppliers to call beneficiaries with whom they have no prior relationship. This type of calling is called “cold calling.” Quite often these callers will neither identify themselves nor provide any information that lets you identify them. Anytime you receive a call from someone who will not identify themselves, **JUST HANG UP!**

Cold callers are usually well trained in obtaining information and sometimes money from those they are calling. If you, as a Medicare beneficiary, talk to these cold callers long enough, they will obtain information from you that they should not have. It is their job and they do it well. The more you talk to them, the greater the chance that you will provide personal information and remain on cold call lists. The best way to avoid this is to **JUST HANG UP!**

Just as a Medicare beneficiary should not allow a stranger who appeared at their door to enter their house, a beneficiary should not allow them to enter via the phone. Every week at the Senior Medicare Patrol of New Jersey (SMP) office we receive several complaints about these calls. The best way to handle this problem is to **JUST HANG UP!** Eventually this should get the calls to stop. This may not be an easy way to deal with those pesky calls, but it seems to be the most effective.

**JUST HANG UP!** is a good rule of thumb for all calls from individuals or companies you don’t know. It is especially important if Medicare beneficiaries receive calls claiming to be from Medicare. Remember, Medicare will not call you on the phone seeking personal information. They already know all about you. These calls are from persons seeking personal information so they can, in most cases, bill Medicare for services never provided. The only way Medicare will communicate with you is by mail.

One suggestion that may be of help: let the answering machine screen your calls. Most people now have answering machines. Don’t pick up the phone if you don’t recognize the number on the ID screen. If the call is legitimate, in most cases they will leave a telephone number to call back. Even then, if you are not familiar with the person or company calling, look up the phone number yourself and return the call. The number that is left on your answering machine may be a number that will connect you to a scam.

The Senior Medicare Patrol of New Jersey (SMP) is under the auspices of the Jewish Family Services of Middlesex County, 32 Ford Avenue, Milltown, NJ. The SMP is here to answer your questions. **Feel free to call the SMP at any time at 732-777-1940 or our hot line at 877-SMP-4359.**

The SMP is funded by a grant to the Jewish Family Services of Middlesex County from the U.S. Administration for Community Living. Our mission is to empower and assist Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and caregivers to prevent, detect, and report health care fraud, errors, and abuse through outreach, counseling, and education.

Our work is in three main areas:

1. **Conduct Outreach and Education.** The SMP gives presentations to groups, exhibit at events, and works one-on-one with Medicare beneficiaries. If you belong to a senior group, private club, synagogue or church or other organization and you would like a free presentation, call Charles Clarkson at 732-777-1940. We will do a presentation anywhere in New Jersey, day or night.

2. **Engage Volunteers.** Protecting older persons’ health, finances, and medical identity while saving precious Medicare dollars is a cause that attracts civic-minded Americans. The SMP engages over 40 volunteers (5,200 volunteers nationally) who collectively assist Medicare beneficiaries.

3. **Receive Beneficiary Complaints.** When Medicare beneficiaries, caregivers, and family members bring their complaints to the SMP, the SMP makes a determination about whether or not fraud, errors, or abuse is suspected. When fraud or abuse is suspected, the SMP assists the beneficiary to resolve the complaint or they make referrals to the appropriate state and federal agencies for further investigation.