

Daily Union – Saturday, November 15, 2014

Vol. 2 Issue 45 – It Pays to Compare!

It's Open Enrollment time... what does that mean? Open Enrollment, in general terms, is a period of time offered once a year, where you can make changes to your insurance coverage and/or insurance company. Usually this is done for the purpose of obtaining better coverage and/or lowering your insurance cost.

With two insurance Open Enrollments that overlap this time of year (Medicare and Health Insurance Marketplace,) you may be wondering which path should be taken to make sure you have adequate coverage. Take a look at the chart below to help you determine which open enrollment applies to you. You might decide neither one applies, but the information can help you later!

	Medicare Open Enrollment	Health Insurance Marketplace
Dates	October 15 – December 7 annually	November 15 – February 15 annually
Clients	Designed for people who are, or very soon will be, on Medicare.	Designed for people who have no health insurance coverage
Type of coverage	Prescription drug plans that supplement traditional Medicare benefits	Health insurance of varying levels of coverage and costs.
Enrolling	Compare Part D prescription plans on Medicare.gov. You can enroll online thru that portal. You can also work with a SHICK counselor to assist you with the process of online plan comparison and enrollment. This service is free to consumers – i.e. beneficiaries.	Compare Marketplace policies on HealthCare.gov. You can enroll online thru that portal. You can also use a Navigator to assist you with the process of online plan comparison and enrollment. This service is free to consumers who are not eligible for Medicare benefits or are not covered by other credible insurance.

Medicare **IS NOT** part of the Health Insurance Marketplace. These two periods of open enrollment are targeting entirely different clients. The Affordable Care Act (which provides for the Health Insurance Marketplace) does not reduce Medicare benefits.

SHICK (Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas) counselors are trained volunteers who work specifically with Medicare beneficiaries or those who are approaching qualification to apply for Medicare. They receive extensive annual training and must be recertified yearly to be approved to offer this free service.

Navigators are trained volunteers who work specifically with consumers who do not have health care coverage and do not qualify for Medicare benefits. They have received specialized training and, just as SHICK counselors, are required to recertify annually. Navigators can work with individuals, families, small businesses, and employees of small businesses to help them compare and choose health insurance coverage.

Insurance seems to have a language of its own. For example, see how well you can translate and solve this scenario offered in the October 2014 Issue Brief published by the American Research Institute:

Early in January, Robert visits an in-network doctor to get a wart removed from his foot. The bill for this visit is \$530, which is the member rate the doctor agreed to charge his health plan for that service. Robert has a \$30 co-pay, a \$100 deductible, and 20% coinsurance that apply for this visit. His co-pay does not count toward the deductible. How much will Robert pay for the visit?

Are you a bit lost? Don't feel bad – you're not alone. In this brief, the American Research Institute shares that only 20% of those in their research study could correctly calculate their total cost for a doctor's visit under these conditions. If you are interested in reading the entire brief, go to <http://www.air.org/health> and click on the October 2014 newsbrief.

I imagine you would like the answer, though:

The question indicates that the deductible, copay and coinsurance all apply. The steps to calculate the correct answer are as follows:

1) subtract the deductible and co-pay from the total charge:

$$\$530 - \$100 - \$30 = \$400;$$

2) calculate the coinsurance: 20% of \$400 = \$80;

3) total the deductible, copay and coinsurance to determine the amount the consumer owes—

$$\$100 + \$30 + \$80 = \mathbf{\$210}.$$

Wading through all the information related to insurance can be overwhelming, but SCHICK and Navigator volunteers are trained to help you work through all of the

information and terminology and arrive at a solution that meets your needs and personal budget. There are several of these volunteers in the Junction City/Geary County area.

To find a Navigator, go to www.HealthCare.gov and click on the "find local help" button on the homepage. Once you type in your zip code, the system will generate an extensive list of Navigators in the area, along with their contact information.

For a SHICK counselor, call my office. Help is available throughout the year. I am certified through SHICK to assist you with the transition to Medicare, evaluate supplemental insurance, and help you compare plans for Medicare Part D during open enrollment.

From October 15 – December 7, Medicare beneficiaries have the option of changing their prescription plan. It is important to look at your options every year because the plans change significantly, both in cost and coverage. Insurance companies usually partner with pharmacies to help reduce client costs. These pharmacies are called "preferred" and that means that they are identified as a part of the insurance plan's network of pharmacies. This is important to know because Part D plans will not pay for prescriptions at non-network pharmacies, except in emergencies. These network partnerships can (and often do) change yearly. This can have a significant impact on the cost to the consumer. During the 2013 open enrollment period, the average annual savings to clients I worked with was over \$500. Most Medicare beneficiaries live on a fixed income and saving \$500 in expenses always helps.

If you have Medicare questions or need to compare Medicare prescription plans, call me at the Geary County Extension office to make an appointment 785-238-4161. Don't wait - open enrollment closes December 7. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!