



Health Bulletin



Medicare Adds Initial Physical And Screening To Benefits

(NAPSA)—A new screening program from Medicare may offer good news for older Americans at risk for cancer. Beginning January 1, 2005, all new Medicare beneficiaries will be able to get an initial physical.

Cancer disproportionately affects the elderly. Last year, more than two million Medicare beneficiaries were actively treated for cancer, and over 380,000 are thought to have died from the disease.

Studies show that a doctor's recommendation is key to a patient seeking cancer screenings; however, Medicare does not currently cover a routine physical or other type of "wellness visit," where a conversation with a doctor about cancer screening is most likely to take place.

The American Cancer Society recognized that making coverage available for an initial "Welcome to Medicare" visit for each individual newly entering the Medicare system would be an important step in improving screening rates in the Medicare population, along with health outcomes. As a result, the Society launched an effort to add the benefit to the Medicare program.

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tate cancers can be detected early using cancer-screening tools. Recognizing the strong value of early detection, Medicare already covers breast, cervical, colon and prostate cancer screenings. Despite this coverage, screening rates have remained low. This new program is designed to change that.

Some of the specifics of the visit include:

- The one-time visit must be performed within six months of a beneficiary's enrollment in the Medicare program.
- The exam will include measurement of height, weight, and

blood pressure, and an electrocardiogram, as well as education, counseling and referral for other preventive services already covered under Medicare, including breast, cervical, colon and prostate cancer-screening tests.

• Medicare beneficiaries will also be eligible for cardiovascular blood-screening tests, medical nutrition therapy and bone mass measurements, and beneficiaries at risk for diabetes will be eligible for diabetes-screening tests, glaucoma screenings, and diabetes outpatient management training.

In 2003, the American Cancer Society led a partnership with the American Diabetes Association and the American Heart Association to make the "Welcome to Medicare" visit a reality and successfully advocated for the benefit to be included in the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003.

The concept was that the visit would allow patients an opportunity to talk with their health care provider about health risk factors, screening and other cancer prevention strategies, such as smoking cessation, as well as the importance of nutrition and physical activity to staying healthy.

To learn more about cancer screenings and prevention, call 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.