



Stay Ahead of Your Health with Free Annual Wellness Visits

by George Andrews, M.D.

(NAPSA)—“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is an important adage to keep top of mind as we each strive to maintain a healthy lifestyle and achieve lifelong well-being.

Beginning at birth, routine physicals are critical for monitoring a newborn’s health and developmental milestones. Even throughout childhood years, parents are diligent about scheduling routine physicals or making a doctor’s appointment at the first sign of an illness in their kids.

However, this practice tends to reverse with aging as many adults delay regular doctor’s visits because they might not feel sick or are afraid of getting a pricey medical bill. In fact, a recent survey from The Senior Citizens League found that 51 percent of older adults put off visiting a doctor or getting outpatient medical services due to concerns about costs. The reality, though, is that postponing medical care can mean greater costs in the long run, particularly for seniors suffering from chronic conditions.

With The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) reporting that 70 percent of Medicare members suffer from at least one chronic condition, annual wellness visits are an important tool in ensuring lifelong well-being and catching serious illnesses early on.

This is why health benefits provider Humana strongly encourages all Medicare members to take advantage of the complimentary annual wellness visit offered through their plans. The CMS-mandated benefit, which has been available to all Medicare members since January 2011, provides members with crucial services and the resources they need to keep their health on track. The visit, which can be performed by a health professional such as a nurse practitioner or physician’s assistant in addition to a doctor, includes:

•Comprehensive Medical Review. When members meet with their primary care physician, they should bring their medical



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records and a list of prescriptions and know about their family’s health history to review with the doctor. During this visit, doctors will also track blood pressure, weight and height to establish a baseline for future appointments, as well as calculate the member’s “body mass index,” or BMI. BMI is a simple way to find out if the individual could have health risks because of excess body fat.

•Mental Health Check. Studies show that seniors are at great risk of some mental disorders, many of which can be accurately diagnosed and treated. During the annual wellness visit, doctors will check for signs of dementia, memory loss, depression and other mental health conditions.

•Developing a Plan. Doctors will examine a patient’s medical history and current health conditions to create a plan for getting necessary shots and services. They will also make sure all preventive screenings for chronic con-

ditions, such as diabetes, heart disease and various forms of cancer, are up to date. And there is more good news—many preventive screenings are also free or low cost for Medicare members.

Although it’s never too late to schedule an annual wellness visit, it’s a good rule of thumb to contact your doctor early in the year. By forming a partnership with your primary care office, you can have the preventive measures to keep yourself on a path to lifelong health and well-being.

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