

NEWS FROM SCDCA

South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Department of Consumer Affairs Warns Consumers about Medicare Telephone Scam and Other Health-Related Fraud

Columbia, SC.....The Department has received several calls from the Upstate in the past week from consumers who were told their Medicare account numbers had been changed. Although the caller knew the persons' names and addresses (generally easy for scammers to obtain), the alert consumers became suspicious when asked for sensitive information such as Social Security and bank account numbers. Consumers should be aware that **no government agency will never contact you by telephone and ask for sensitive and identifying information.**

Seniors and caregivers of seniors are being targeted with this scam and others. Medicare fraud can take the form of many health-related scams. Senior citizens are frequent targets of Medicare schemes, especially by medical equipment manufacturers who offer seniors free medical products in exchange for their Medicare numbers. Because a physician has to sign a form certifying that equipment or testing is needed before Medicare pays for it, con artists fake signatures or bribe corrupt doctors to sign the forms. Once a signature is in place, the manufacturers bill Medicare for merchandise or service that was not needed or was not ordered.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation confirms that the threat to seniors is growing – and changing. Baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are now the largest segment of our population. That means that the number of senior citizens is rising. Many younger boomers also have considerable

About the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs:

Established by the Consumer Protection code in 1974, The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs represents the interests of South Carolina Consumers.

Our mission is to protect consumers from inequities in the marketplace through advocacy, mediation, enforcement and education.

For more information, visit www.sccoconsumer.gov.

computer skills, so criminals are modifying their targeting techniques – using not only traditional telephone calls and mass mailings but also online scams like phishing and e-mail spamming.

Some Tips to Avoid Health-Related Fraud:

- Never sign blank insurance claim forms.
- Never give blanket authorization to a medical provider to bill for services rendered.
- Ask your medical providers what they will charge and what you will be expected to pay out-of-pocket.
- Carefully review your insurer’s explanation of the benefits statement. Call your insurer and provider if you have questions.
- Do not do business with door-to-door or telephone salespeople who tell you that services of medical equipment are free.
- Give your insurance/Medicare identification only to those who have provided you with medical services.
- Keep accurate records of all health care appointments.
- Confirm with your doctor’s office that your physician ordered equipment for you.

For more information on senior and health-related scams or other consumer issues, contact the Public Information Division at 803.734.4190, toll free in SC at 1.800.922.1594, or online at www.sconsumer.gov.