

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

MARKETING: Should You Help Teach Seniors About Medicare Drug Benefit?

Watch out for conflicts of interest, experts warn

Your Medicare patients are confused about the new prescription drug benefit, and they may look to your practice for help.

You can reap a huge benefit in public perception of your practice by helping to educate patients about the new Part D drug benefit, say experts. Unfortunately, there are several pitfalls to watch out for, including conflicts of interest with drug companies.

If your practice helps Medicare patients figure out their prescription drug options, you can reap a huge reward in reputation, says marketing expert **Terry McVey** with **McVey Associates** in Novato, CA. "Creating trust is the secret to gaining new patients," McVey adds.

Unfortunately, if you help your patients too much with choosing a drug plan, it could look like a conflict of interest to the feds, warns consultant **Phyllis Yingling** with **Apple A Day** in Hilton Head, SC. "Physician offices need to stay out of it," she warns. Because insurance companies and drug makers are offering their own plans, there are plenty of pitfalls if you recommend one particular plan over others. In California alone, there are 45 stand-alone drug plans and another 85 offered by managed care plans, according to press reports.

"It's Medicare's responsibility to educate the public on this," Yingling points out.

Useful information on the new drug benefit is available online, but the Internet may not be the best medium for educating seniors. It's "a technology-based solution applied to a non-technology-based population," laments **Jill Young** with **Young Medical Consulting** in East Lansing, MI.

The good news is that some private groups, or county health or aging departments, are running local seminars to help patients sort through all their prescription drug options, says Young.

What you can do: Offer contact phone numbers for all the plans in your area or post fliers in the office for upcoming seminars, suggests Yingling. But she doesn't advise getting too heavily involved in helping patients navigate the maze of drug plans--or you could find yourself in trouble. "It's very complex," she warns.