

Roane County woman warns not to fall for Medicare scam

By: Don Dare

Medicare fraud is on the rise. According to the federal government, billions of dollars are lost every year. One scam has to do with durable medical equipment like back braces, and the most vulnerable to this scam are the elderly.

The Washington-based Coalition Against Insurance Fraud says there's a lot of money in this for the scammers and they don't give up trying. When the heat gets turned up on one type of Medicare fraud, as it did on motorized wheelchairs, the scammers shift gears and devise a new plot.

The best way to protect yourself from being victimized is to be aware of the most recent types of frauds.

Retired Roane County substitute teacher Jackie Hannah hurt her back working outside last fall and it still aches. She got a call earlier this month from someone that said, "We're Medicare."

"That's the only reason I listened to them. If they hadn't said Medicare first thing, I would have hung up," said Hannah. "Well they wanted to know if I had arthritis. If I did, I was eligible, may be eligible for a back brace."

You may have seen a television infomercial about back braces available from Medicare. Hannah said she's seen this information another reason why at first she believed she was talking to people from Medicare.

"Well, they wanted to know my name, my address, how old I was," she said.

She gave them the information, not worried about it because the Medicare numbers are those of her deceased husband. She is listed as a dependent. Hannah wrote down multiple phone numbers, all from different area codes.

"By the third or fourth call I got, I told them that I was beginning to think it was a scam. Of course, they denied it and has someone call. They were going to mail it to me, the next Wednesday. Every time I talked to them, it was going to be the next Wednesday. Isn't that funny?" she said.

Scams against Medicare are not new and have been a top concern in Washington for decades, in part because the scams are so expensive. Just a few years ago, for instance, according to government records, Medicare paid out almost \$50 billion in improper payments, fraudulent bills, that should not have been paid.

Fraud is a moving target and the fraudsters constantly change their tactics, but one thing Medicare does not do is call you. Hannah knows that now.

"I called Medicare and they don't call people, unless we have instructed them to call us. I'm afraid that somebody that doesn't pick up on this is going to get hurt. Especially people living alone," Hannah said.

If you or someone in your family gets health care services from Medicare, record the dates and save the receipts and statements you get from providers to check for mistakes. If you find items in your claims that you don't have a record of, it's possible that you or Medicare may have been billed for services or items you didn't get.

Call 1-800-MEDICARE if you or a loved one suspect that Medicare is being charged for health care you didn't get or if you don't know the provider on the claim.

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**Coalition Against
Insurance Fraud**