



TRI-VALLEY Help-line

June 2008

Tri-Valley receives many questions from area seniors, younger people with disabilities and caregivers and has created this monthly Help-line column to provide some assistance. We are also available five days a week to answer individual questions.

Medicare & Smokers

Q: Will Medicare pay for 'quit-smoking' counseling?

A: Yes. Medicare provides coverage for smoking and tobacco-use counseling. To get assistance, you have to meet one of two criteria: 1) you have a smoking-related disease, or 2) you're taking a medication whose dose is affected by tobacco use. Medicare Part B will cover 2 attempts at quitting per year. Each attempt includes up to 4 face-to-face counseling sessions, or a total of 8 counseling sessions per year. You can also get another 8 sessions in a second year. These visits must be ordered by your doctor and provided by a Medicare-recognized practitioner. Medicare classifies these counseling sessions as "intermediate" if they last 3 to 10 minutes, or "intensive" if they last longer than 10 minutes. You and your practitioner decide how long each session should be.

Use of tobacco is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in America. Although smoking rates have dropped significantly, almost 10% of seniors over the age of 65 are smokers. As many as 440,000 people die each year from smoking-related diseases. Most of those deaths—300,000—are people age 65 and older. Smoking is macular degeneration, cataracts, osteoporosis, and many other diseases. In addition to nicotine, there are more than 4,000 chemicals in cigarette smoke. Some of them are also in wood varnish, the insect poison DDT, arsenic, nail polish remover, and rat poison. Not

only do cigarettes damage your heart and lungs. They also make it harder for you to taste and smell things, and fight infections.

Studies show that older smokers are more successful in their efforts to quit than younger people. Counseling has been shown to increase the chances of successfully quitting. Medicare's interest is also financial: the federal government says that quitting smoking leads to significant risk reduction for certain diseases, even in older adults who have smoked for years. People who are diagnosed with a smoking-related disease, like heart disease, stroke, multiple cancers, lung disease, weak bones, blood clots, and cataracts can get coverage for smoking and tobacco use counseling. People who take any of the many medications whose effectiveness is complicated by tobacco use, such as insulin and some medicines for high blood pressure, blood clots, and depression, are also eligible for the counseling.

Medicare will pay for 80% of the Medicare-approved amount of the cost of tobacco counseling sessions. You pay the 20% remaining, after you meet the \$135 Part B deductible. Before you agree to any counseling session, ask if your provider is willing to accept "assignment," which means they are willing to take the "Medicare approved rate" for this service as payment in full, and not charge you more than your 20% share of the approved amount.

If you're on Medicare, and still smoking, ask your doctor about the Medicare counseling program. For more information on these services, call 1-800-Medicare, or go to www.smokefree.gov.

Tri-Valley continues to be ready to assist you with other questions through its free information & referral HELP-LINE at (508) 949-6640 or 1-800-286-6640. You may also access Tri-Valley by E-mail: info@tves.org or visit the agency's website at: www.trivalleyinc.org

Tri-Valley, Inc. is a private non-profit agency providing in-home and community based services in 25 Southern Worcester County towns. The agency receives funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and Federal financial support under the Older Americans Act furnished by the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder

Affairs. Funds are also received from other public and private sources. All donations are welcome and memorials may be established. Marilyn L. Travinski is the executive director.

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