

OKLAHOMA ALLIANCE ON AGING
Report of July 22, 2005 Education Committee
CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF MEDICARE PART D

PRESENT: Janis Jones (Oklahoma City Social Security Office), Janice Park Melloy and Martin Melloy (Stillwater), Helen Patrick (volunteer, Oklahoma Alliance on Aging Newsletter Editor, Norman) Gloria Peck (Home Health Provider, Oklahoma City), Vivian Smith (volunteer, Oklahoma Alliance on Aging Education Chairman, Yukon), Teddy Wire (Hope Community Services Gem-psychiatric Coordinator, Oklahoma City)

BACKGROUND: Soaring costs of prescription drugs for Medicare patients have been an issue not adequately addressed by the federal government, in part because of the influence of drug manufacturer through their political action committees and contributions to candidates and members of Congress. These same interests have so far successfully prevented the re-importation of drugs from Canada.

Medicare Part D, the Medicare Modification Act, was approved by Congress in 2003 as a step toward preparing to meet the needs of low-income individuals and families for affordable prescription medications. Too few Medicare beneficiaries understand the Medicare drug benefit. Social Security Office staffs in the country are arranging meetings to educate people about Part D. The meeting in Oklahoma City, at the Mayfair Center, was the first such meeting in the country, -- open to anyone interested, to help older people and their caretakers understand the program. About 300 people were expected, and 1100 people attended! Efforts now focus on reaching groups of eligible older people and their families, wherever they live.

PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL SECURITY STAFF MEMBERS
Janis Jones, Oklahoma City Office

The Medicare Part D law passed in 2003 will do away with prescription drug cards still being used in 2005; it will automatically enroll low income Medicare people, including all of those served by Medicaid. There is a need to reach low income people who are not being served by Medicaid. People with both Medicare and Supplemental Security Income will have received a lengthy **Application for Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs**, and detailed instructions for completing the form, including individuals such as friends or family members who are helping individuals complete the form. Enrollment starts the month after people are registered in the Prescription Drug Plan, with implementation starting in 2006. The Social Security Administration staff is trying to get as many individuals as possible enrolled in the Prescription Drug Plan, with many details still to be worked out. The Oklahoma City Social Security staff is scheduling meetings in other locations around the area including Metro Tech and nutrition sites. Indian Health services will be included in the dialogue. The role of private prescription drug plans is still being worked out.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Before enrollment begins on November 15, 2005 plan an event that will provide trained speakers and volunteers --- and telephones and computers to help older Oklahomans and their caretakers with Part D.

For further information, contact Richard Ingham attorney on the staff of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Division of Aging Services. He can be reached at 405-522-3069 or Richard.Ingham@okdhs.org. His services are free.