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Scammers Target Medicare Open Enrollment

Editor's Note: The following item was submitted by the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services.

TOPEKA—Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) Secretary Kari Bruffett warned today that the Medicare open enrollment season is also open season for medical identity thieves who target unsuspecting seniors.

Open enrollment, during which Medicare beneficiaries can make changes to their health plans and prescription coverage, takes place October 15 through December 7 each year.

“Medicare fraud and medical identity theft is a year-round concern, but open enrollment is a time to be especially vigilant,” Secretary Bruffett said. “Be alert and don’t let yourself be scammed.”

One of the most common tricks is for scam artists posing as federal government employees from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) or other government agencies to call consumers and claim that new Medicare cards are being issued. They tell consumers that in order to get their new card they must provide the caller with very private and sensitive information, such as Medicare numbers, Social Security numbers and birthdates.

“Do not give this information to anyone who calls you, no matter how legitimate the call may seem. Medicare never calls and asks you for personal information over the phone. Nor will people from Medicare visit your home uninvited and ask for that kind of sensitive information. And beware of unsolicited emails asking for your information as well,” Secretary Bruffett said. “If you are contacted, hang up, ignore, do not invite them in and do not respond.”

“It’s up to you to guard your information,” she said.

Seniors have also been tricked into giving up their sensitive medical identity information after being enticed with free lunches, prize drawings and other inducements.

In addition, open enrollment is a prime time for unscrupulous salesmen to pressure people into buying supplemental insurance products that will supposedly save thousands and still meet their needs. Some seniors have signed up for plans that do not allow them to continue seeing their doctors or get needed medications.

“If something sounds too good to be true, beware,” Secretary Bruffett said.

The Federal Trade Commission reports that more than 3,300 cases of medical identity theft occurred during 2014, with more than 8,000 cases reported between 2012 and 2014.

If you believe you’ve been a victim of fraudulent activity or someone has contacted you pretending to be from Medicare, contact the Kansas Senior Medicare Patrol (SHICK) at 800 432-3535

For answers to your questions and reliable assistance in evaluating different Medicare plans, contact your local Area Agency on Aging to confer with a trained SHICK counselor.

<http://www.k4a.org/area-agencies-on-aging/aaa-map>.

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