

Satisfaction with Information about Medicare

Executive Summary

This report examines the satisfaction levels of beneficiaries concerning the information they have about Medicare, and the usefulness of the sources of information they contacted. The data come from a series of community surveys done as part of a NMEP monitoring activity for CMS conducted by Abt Associates in six cities (Tucson, Sarasota, Dayton, Springfield MA, Olympia, and Eugene). Data is available for samples of beneficiaries drawn in each site in four waves: during October 1998 (before the mailing of the Handbook), and during January/February of 1999, 2000, and 2001. The telephone survey asks questions about sources and frequency of information used, satisfaction with information, knowledge of Medicare, situational events that might prompt needs for information, and demographic questions.

Overall, about eighty percent of all beneficiaries we surveyed are satisfied or very satisfied with the stock of the information they have about Medicare. Only one percent say they are very dissatisfied.

We also examined beneficiary search outcomes in more detail by focusing on these beneficiaries we surveyed who reported seeking information about particular Medicare topics in the prior twelve months. We asked about information-seeking activities pertaining to three types of broad question areas that might be posed by beneficiaries about Medicare: claims/ billing issues, supplemental insurance issues, and managed care issues. About 37 percent of the beneficiaries we surveyed had sought information on one or more of these topics during the past year, and about a third of these persons reported seeking information on more than one of the issue areas.

Most of these beneficiaries who said they sought information on one or more of these topics in the past year were successful in finding a source for it (77 percent of those who reported seeking the information). This information usage includes both official Medicare sources of information, as well as other community sources. Nearly all of the beneficiaries who found any source of information reported that their questions were answered (about 90 percent). There is also a clear trend over time of increasing success by beneficiaries in finding sources for their questions on these three issues.

CMS sources of information have also been increasingly useful to beneficiaries. In the 2001 survey, about one third of beneficiaries seeking information on Medigap insurance issues turned to CMS sources, up from 11 percent two years ago. The

number of beneficiaries who mentioned CMS as a source of information about managed care questions has approximately doubled every year since we began conducting the survey, and now stands at 17 percent of those with questions on this topic. These increases in reliance on official Medicare sources for information on the three topics we asked about may be an effect of NMEP information supply policies. We have no direct test for this hypothesis.

Knowledge of Medicare (which we examined by means of a short battery of true/false questions) is an important factor in understanding the success in finding information, and in understanding the level of satisfaction. Persons knowledgeable about Medicare are more satisfied with information and more likely to find a source and an answer to their question. The direction of causality is not possible to know, however. We cannot say whether those seeking and finding information learned more about Medicare, or whether persons who knew more about Medicare were more likely to seek information and knew where to look.

A significant and identifiable minority of beneficiaries remain dissatisfied with their stock of Medicare information and, when they seek information, are less likely to get their questions answered. These persons tend to have low levels of formal education, are less knowledgeable about Medicare, and are those confronted with unusually difficult life events during the past year, particularly financial hardship. There is some indication that the eldest beneficiaries are not as satisfied as others. There is not evidence here of substantial difference in beneficiary satisfaction or information seeking outcomes across sites, for racial minorities, or for other sub populations.

