Facts About Preventive Benefits

New Medicare Benefits

- Historically, Medicare's coverage has focused on paying to treat costly health problems after they occur. The best way to deal with health problems is to prevent them when possible.
- In recent years, Medicare has added a number of screenings and preventive services. Medicare's benefits continue to include: vaccinations, bone mass measurement, glaucoma screenings, medical nutrition therapy, and screenings for cancers of the colon, breast, cervix, and prostate.
- Unfortunately, although Medicare has closed the "coverage gap" for prevention, patients have not fully utilized these services. Medicare has made a number of improvements to encourage people with Medicare to use these important preventive services.
- Beginning in 2005, all people newly enrolled in Medicare Part B will be covered for an initial "Welcome to Medicare" physical examination. This exam **must** take place during the first six months after enrollment.
- The "Welcome to Medicare" physical exam includes:
  - measurement of height, weight, and blood pressure;
  - an electrocardiogram; and
  - education, counseling, and referrals related to other preventive benefits covered by Medicare, such as screenings and disease prevention services.
- This exam can be used to screen people with Medicare for many illnesses. If these illnesses are caught early, they can be treated and managed. Early diagnosis, through preventive efforts such as the "Welcome to Medicare" physical exam, can result in fewer serious illnesses and health consequences.
- The "Welcome to Medicare" physical exam provides all people newly enrolled in Medicare with an opportunity to discuss the importance of preventive care and living a healthy lifestyle with their physicians.

Facts About Preventive Benefits (cont.)

Closing the Prevention Gap

- Medicare is working hard to close the "prevention gap"—the difference between the number of people with Medicare who could take advantage of preventive services, (which include vaccines and screenings) and those who actually do.
- Closing this gap could save many thousands of lives as well as billions of dollars in avoidable medical expenses for preventable medical conditions. Unhealthy behaviors, such as inactive lifestyles, smoking and poor diet, lead to serious illnesses including: heart disease, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, and emphysema.
- Medicare Advantage plans have the flexibility to cover more far-reaching preventive services, such as wellness programs, beyond what Medicare covers. Medicare Advantage plans offer additional preventive benefits, including health education services, exercise programs and other services that alert patients to potential health risks, but also work with them to change harmful lifestyles and encourage healthy behavioral changes.

Diabetes Screening

- One of the new screening tests available as of January 1, 2005 is diabetes screening for those at risk for the disease. This includes people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, or a history of high blood sugar. Other risk factors may also qualify people with Medicare for these tests.
- This is a critically important test for those at risk. The earlier a person is diagnosed and treated for diabetes, the more likely it is that the serious health consequences of this disease can be prevented or delayed.
- Millions of people have diabetes and do not even know it. It is important for those who have been diagnosed with this disease to have the appropriate care and treatment.
- Diabetes screening will also improve quality of life for those with the disease by treating the condition early. Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness and end stage renal disease among adults. With early detection and treatment, the development of severe vision loss can be reduced by 50–60 percent and kidney failure can be reduced by 30–70 percent.
- This new diabetes screening test is free. There is no deductible and no co-pay.

Facts About Preventive Benefits (cont.)

Cardiovascular Screening

- Another new benefit, now covered by Medicare, is cardiovascular screening. For the first time, people with Medicare will be eligible for cholesterol testing and other blood fat measurements.
- Since heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, it is important to help find those people at risk for developing heart disease or stroke.
- With this simple screening test, millions of people with Medicare can learn if they have an increased risk of developing heart disease and how they can control their cholesterol levels through diet, physical activity or, if necessary, with medication.
- Cardiovascular screenings may help to improve the quality of life for people at risk for cardiovascular diseases. This is important because high cholesterol is hard to detect without the test. The earlier people are treated, the more likely they will avoid life-threatening events such as heart attacks and strokes.
- As with the diabetes screening, cardiovascular screening is free. There is no deductible and no co-pay for this test.

For more specific information about these benefits and other Medicare preventive services, get a free copy of the ***Guide to Medicare's Preventive Services*** (CMS Pub. No.10110) at **www.medicare.gov** on the web by selecting "Publications." Or, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.