

FraudAlert!

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Wisconsin SMP

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• Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups Elder Law Center

From the Project Director. Elizabeth Conrad

Let's Get Acquainted

By Judy Steinke, WI SMP Volunteer Coordinator

Have you heard the Wisconsin SMP Public Service Announcements (PSAs)? Jane Travis, of La Crosse, called our office after hearing one in the spring of 2010. The PSA caught her attention because she had been concerned about the inaccuracies of Medicare charges for her own health care as well as friends and family. Jane, a retired nurse, educator, and administrator, then recruited several of her friends and former co-workers to create a team of volunteers in the La Crosse area. Currently, there are 8 trained volunteers in the La Crosse and Mindoro areas and Jane continues to recruit more.

Jane has taken the lead to organize the group by assisting in securing a location for the SMP Volunteer Foundations training in June of 2010 and holding regular meetings at the Onalaska library. Connections have been made with the La Crosse County Aging Unit, and the volunteers were trained to assist with the Part D annual enrollment process last fall. Jane and the La Crosse group continue to search for opportunities to share the SMP message. In March, three members of the group were invited to share SMP information on a local radio show.

Jane's dedication to volunteering does not stop with the SMP. She chooses to volunteer in organizations and activities that focus on problems, concerns, or issues in which she is interested and feels that she has the knowledge and skills to make a difference. Jane's volunteer activities include:

- Community gardening projects as a member of the Bluff Country Master Gardener Association
- Membership chair of the La Crosse Area Retired Educators' Association
- Reader for the "Bookworm" program of Head Start
- President of the Fauver Hill Study Club
- Retiree representative on the Health Benefits Improvement Team for Western Technical College

Wisconsin SMP
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Let's Get Acquainted *continued*

Jane was born and raised in west central Pennsylvania where her only sibling still resides. Pets are a big part of Jane's life, and she currently has a chocolate lab, two cats, and a canary. When not volunteering, she finds time for her hobbies that include gardening, reading, travel, and Zumba classes.

Thank you, Jane, for responding to the PSA! The Wisconsin SMP is very fortunate to have such a motivated and dedicated volunteer in La Crosse County.

SMP Volunteers – The “Boots On The Ground”

By Judy Steinke, WI SMP Volunteer Coordinator

The success of the Wisconsin SMP project is due to the statewide volunteers and partners who provide outreach and education to Medicare beneficiaries, their caregivers, and the professionals who serve them. The staff members of the Wisconsin SMP recognize their contributions and so does Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services. While giving a speech at the Stop Medicare Fraud Summit in Los Angeles last August, she made the following comment:

“And over the last year, we've made a serious commitment to get even more boots on the ground. We've more than tripled the number of Medicare fraud strike force teams from two to seven. We're expanding the program that enlists Medicare beneficiaries in fighting fraud, known as the Senior Medicare Patrol. And we're adding an extra \$350 million over the next ten years to expand our anti-fraud efforts.”

The outreach and education provided by SMP volunteers is valuable in protecting and preserving the Medicare program. Unfortunately, unless the stories are reported, there really is no way of knowing how many errors were detected, how many times a scam artist did not get someone's Medicare number over the phone, or how many times a beneficiary said no to “free” items or services in exchange for the Medicare number. The educational information provided by SMP volunteers has helped to make beneficiaries a little more cautious about sharing their personal information, and that is exactly what makes the volunteers so valuable. Being the “boots on the ground” and sharing information in their local communities.

According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, the 2010 per hour value of volunteer service was \$21.36, and it is estimated that an average of 1.5 million residents of the state of Wisconsin are volunteers. The Wisconsin SMP project proudly recognizes and thanks the volunteers and partners for their many hours and miles donated to fight Medicare fraud.

Wisconsin SMP Volunteers

- S** SMP volunteers are SUPER. They readily accept assignments and SEARCH for opportunities to SHARE SMP information STATEWIDE.
- M** SMP volunteers are MOTIVATED to help save MEDICARE dollars.
- P** SMP volunteers are our PREFERRED PACKERS and PROMOTERS . SMP volunteers willingly PACK large numbers of PERSONAL HEALTH CARE JOURNALS and other handouts to attend fairs and expos where they PROMOTE the need to PROTECT, DETECT and REPORT.

The staff of the Wisconsin SMP project, would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have supported the project in any way. A statewide project, such as this, could not be sustained without the many hours of valuable service donated by the volunteers.

THANK YOU!

Your talents and skills are needed!

The Wisconsin Health Insurance Assistance Program is looking for people who have the desire and time to help seniors with Medicare Part D (Prescription Drug) counseling during the busy enrollment period (October 15th 2011 through December 7th 2011).

If you are computer and internet savvy, and can commit to working at least ten to fifteen hours per week, we will offer training in the spring or summer. Training may involve up to twenty hours of your time.

Reasons to join:

- Make a difference in your community
- Assist people with their health benefits
- Save people money
- Positively impact others' lives
- Meet new people
- Experience professional growth
- Educate your community
- Be part of a dynamic team

If interested, please contact Rita Cairns, Wisconsin SHIP : rita.cairns@wisconsin.gov THANK YOU! Please note that insurance agents, insurance brokers, and financial planners are not eligible to serve as SHIP volunteers.

Beware of SeniorCare Scams

Fact: Wisconsin's SeniorCare drug program has not been abolished

When you get a phone call claiming to be from SeniorCare, asking for your personal information (Medicare number, bank account number, etc.) that's not really from SeniorCare—remember, caller ID can be spoofed—and it's not part of the debate. It's an attempt to steal your identity.

Just like the callers who tell you that your Medicare card has “expired” and you need to tell them the number so you can be issued a new one.

Just like the letters saying you've won a million dollars, but you have to send your bank account number “so we can deposit the money.”

Don't be fooled.

Identity thieves will use anything people are worried about. Right now it's SeniorCare, two years ago it was H1N1, a year from now it will be something else.

Reprinted with permission from the Wisconsin Better Business Bureau

BBB Warns: Extremely High Risk of Phishing Emails

Advice for Customers at Risk Due to Epsilon Data Breach

Milwaukee, Wis. - April 4, 2011 - The Better Business Bureau has already heard from hundreds of consumers nationwide that may be victims of phishing attempts, due to the massive data breach of thousands of names and email addresses from Dallas-based Epsilon. The company, a third-party marketing service used by high-profile businesses to distribute emails to customers, confirmed the data breach last Friday and explained that the information stolen was limited to names and email addresses. The amount of data stolen is under investigation and has not yet been officially confirmed.

According to [SecurityWeek](#), hotels, banking institutions and retail giants including Best Buy, Citi, Chase, U.S. Bank, Capitol One, Walgreens, Kroger, Marriott International, Ritz-Carlton Rewards, Brookstone, New York & Co., TiVo, HSN and L.L. Bean are among the confirmed companies whose customer data has been stolen.

Given that the hackers now have access to customer email addresses, there is an extremely high risk for phishing attacks, where hackers may pose as official companies in an attempt to fraudulently obtain consumers' personal or financial information. BBB warns all consumers to use extreme caution and suggests the following tips to avoid becoming a victim of a phishing attack:

- Never reply to an email that is asking you for personal information. Even if the email appears to be from a trusted source, this may be a phishing attack, where someone is trying to illegitimately obtain your personal or financial information and it should be considered a threat. Delete the email immediately.

- **Do not click on any links in an email from a company or an individual that you are unfamiliar with.** This may be a phishing attack, where someone is trying to redirect you to a website that may automatically trigger malicious code and infect your computer. If you really want to check out a link sent to you by email, research the company or individual first to confirm they are trustworthy. If so, then manually retype the link into a secure web browser.

- **Always verify a website's security before sharing information.** Whenever you are providing sensitive information such as credit cards or bank information, make sure the address bar shows "https://" rather than just "http://" which indicates that the web browser is secure.

- **Keep anti-spyware, anti-virus and anti-spam software up to date.** While consumers are ultimately responsible for keeping personal and financial information private, these technologies are designed to help keep phishing attacks at a minimum.

Update on SMP Capacity Building Grant

By Kevin Brown, Wisconsin SMP Capacity Building Grant Manager/Trainer

In October 2010, the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups was awarded a one-year grant to expand the capacity of its Wisconsin SMP (Senior Medicare Patrol) program. Elena Satut Duncan and I were hired in November to implement the SMP Capacity Building Grant. We have reached the half-way point of the grant period, and I am pleased to report that Wisconsin SMP has made significant progress in our efforts to empower more seniors to prevent healthcare fraud in our state.

One of our most important accomplishments has been recruiting and training many new volunteers for our program. I conducted Wisconsin SMP Volunteer Trainings in Glendale, Green Bay, and Phillips in the first three months of 2011. Twenty-three volunteers and professional partners, including four elderly benefit specialists, attended the three sessions. Several training participants have already begun assisting our program by doing group presentations and/or distributing our materials at community events. Many of our other new SMP volunteers will help us educate Medicare beneficiaries, caregivers, and professionals how to prevent, detect, and report healthcare fraud, waste, and abuse at some of the upcoming events listed elsewhere in this newsletter.

I am very pleased to announce that Wisconsin SMP will be conducting two more volunteer training sessions in the coming months. The first workshop will be held on May 4 at the CWAG office in Madison from 9:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. On June 21, a Wisconsin SMP Volunteer Training session will be held at the Two Rivers Senior Center from 9:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. These workshops are open to all interested volunteers and professionals, but pre-registration is required. If you would like to attend one of the sessions, please contact me at (800) 488-2596, ext. 315 or kbrown@cwag.org.

Another major accomplishment of the past six months has been the development and production of six new audio podcasts. "An Overview on Medicare" and "Common Errors, Abuse, and Fraud Associated with Medicare" were posted on the Wisconsin SMP website in March and April, respectively. The topic of the third podcast is "What is Wisconsin SMP?" It will be posted on our project website the first week in May. The other three podcasts will be rolled out in June, July and August.

All of the podcasts are three to five minutes long and were recorded in English, Spanish, and Hmong. We also produced promotional messages (15 or 30 seconds in length) in all three languages to publicize the release of each podcast. The English language spot airs once or twice a day on 74 radio

stations across the state during the week the podcast is posted. The Spanish version of the message airs on Hispanic radio stations in Madison and Milwaukee, and the promotional spot recorded in Hmong runs on stations in four areas of Wisconsin that have large Hmong populations: Madison, Green Bay, Sheboygan, and Sister Bay.

You can listen to our podcasts and get more information about Wisconsin SMP at our project website: www.wisconsinsmp.org.

Mequon Ex-CEO to Pay \$27 Million in Health Care Charges

The founder of Dr. Comfort, a Mequon shoe company, has agreed to plead guilty to a felony charge of mail fraud and pay \$27 million in health care fraud charges. Rickey Kanter, of Mequon, founded Dr. Comfort in 2002, after Congress allowed Medicare to reimburse some diabetics for therapeutic footwear.

The government was investigating Dr. Comfort for selling shoe inserts that were falsely represented and marketed by Dr. Comfort as conforming to Medicare's requirement for those products. Many of its products were provided to Medicare beneficiaries, and thus the inserts were reimbursed by Medicare.

The civil settlement resolves two lawsuits filed under the whistleblower provisions of the False Claims Act, which allow private citizens with knowledge of fraud to bring civil actions on behalf of the United States and share in any recovery, according to the press release of the U.S. attorney's office in Milwaukee. The whistleblowers, both former employees of Dr. Comfort, will share more than \$4.8 million from the civil recovery.

The original whistleblower, Matthew Snorek, worked as an hourly employee at the company. He started working in the factory making customized insoles. The insoles were to be based on molds of the patients' feet. But Snorek said instead of making individual inserts for each foot, he was told to use a computer to make a mirror image from a scan of one foot, to scan broken molds, or to use standardized molds. After repeatedly raising concerns, he was transferred to another department.

Snorek's last job at the company was to make shoes and inserts that had been returned by customers to look new, through use of carpet cleaner, paint and color sticks. In September of 2005, he was fired for not "recirculating" enough returned shoes. "They said I was being too selective," Snorek said. "I actually thought I was being pretty liberal with some of the beat up shoes I restored."

From there, Snorek took it upon himself to try and inform the authorities of what he saw at Dr. Comfort. He informed tip lines and various federal agencies involved with Medicare and, after much work, found a lawyer to file suit against Kanter and other top Dr. Comfort staff in March of 2006.

About a month later, a former chief operating officer, David Shlageter of Thiensville, filed his own False Claims Act Suit against Dr. Comfort. Beginning in 2004, Medicare would only reimburse for heat-moldable inserts of a specific thickness. In June of 2004, Medicare rejected a Dr. Comfort insert as too thin to qualify for Medicare reimbursement. Dr. Comfort later submitted a different product and said the first ones were only preproduction samples. Medicare approved the new product, but Shlageter informed authorities that Dr. Comfort continued to sell the thinner soles under the guise of selling the approved product, yet continued to receive Medicare reimbursements.

The government recommended that Kanter be sentenced to 18 months in prison, but a federal judge will have the final say at a later date. Kanter has agreed to be excluded from participation in all federal health care programs, including Medicare and Medicaid, for fifteen years.

Snorek received \$800,000 for his share of the reward. He will net about \$250,000 after taxes and attorney fees. Since Schlageter's information revealed more fraudulent practices at Dr. Comfort, Schlageter received \$4 million. Snorek said he plans to buy a new home in Racine County. He is working on a book about his experience as a whistleblower and he hopes his story will encourage others to speak up about fraud against the government.

According to the Department of Justice, the federal government recently set a two-year record for health care fraud enforcement efforts, recovering \$4.6 billion since January 2009 in taxpayer funds under the False Claims Act from health care providers and others in the industry.

You can learn more about the history of the False Claims Act and how it works by listening to an interview with Wisconsin SMP's director and taking a False Claims Act Quiz: <http://www.wisconsinsmp.org/2010/05/false-claims-act-helps-catch-fraud/>.

Sources: Journal Sentinel (4/17/2011 and 4/12/2011) and www.justice.gov

To learn more about the False Claims Act, read the article below that appeared in the Wisconsin SMP March 2010 edition of the Fraud Alert!

A Quick Overview of the False Claims Act

In January of 2010, the federal government filed a complaint under the **False Claims Act** against Johnson & Johnson and two of its subsidiaries. The suit alleges that Johnson & Johnson paid millions in illegal kickbacks to Omnicare, the nation's largest nursing-home pharmacy. (Back in November 2009, Omnicare paid state and federal governments \$98 million to settle allegations of kickbacks.)

The **False Claims Act** makes it illegal for anyone to make claims on the government that he or she knows or should know are false. (This doesn't include tax fraud, which is dealt with by other laws.) For example, a doctor who bills Medicare for services he did not actually provide is liable under the False Claims Act. In the Omnicare case, the kickback scheme caused Medicaid, and thus the government, to be improperly billed for drugs. For instance, the atypical antipsychotic drug Risperdal has not been approved by the FDA for the treatment of dementia. A doctor can legally prescribe it for an "off-label" use, but Medicaid cannot be billed for uses that do not have FDA approval. It is alleged that Johnson & Johnson paid Omnicare to coax doctors to prescribe Risperdal to nursing-home patients even when it was being used to treat conditions for which it was not approved.

Other recent high-profile **False Claims Act** cases also involve the health care industry: for instance, the highest recovery to date was \$1 billion paid by Pfizer. However, the act was originally intended to combat fraud in defense spending. The **False Claims Act** was first enacted in 1863, in an attempt to deal with the problem of Civil War contractors who profited by selling the Union army faulty rifles, unhealthy mules, and unfit-to-eat rations. *The Act not only prohibited making false claims on the government, it also authorized private citizens (called relators) to sue the entity making the false claim to recover the amount due to the government, plus a penalty and multiplier. The citizens bringing such*

suits are called relators because they're not suing to redress an injury they have suffered themselves, like ordinary plaintiffs.

Lawsuits brought by a private relator on behalf of the government are called “**qui tam**” suits. The Latin name comes from a phrase in English common law, *qui tam pro domino rege quam pro se ipso in hac parte sequitur*, translated as “he who brings an action for our lord the king as well as for himself.” Suits brought by relators are also known as “**whistleblower**” lawsuits.

Under the 1863 law, relators could receive 50% of the money recovered in a successful suit. This was meant to encourage and reward relators. However, in 1943 the law was amended because of a perception that relators were not exposing fraud so much as trying to cash in by “exposing” things that were already known. The amendments reduced the relator’s share and eliminated some qui tam suits entirely.

In 1986, the law was amended again, because of new reports of fraud and waste in the defense industry. The amendments were proposed by Senator Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) and Rep. Howard Berman (D-California) and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan. The law was amended again in 2009, to strengthen it in the wake of the stimulus and TARP (Troubled Asset Recovery Program). Under the current law, the government can recover triple the amount it is due, plus penalties, plus attorney’s fees for the relator’s lawyers in qui tam cases. The relator’s share is from 15-30%. Since 1986, the False Claims Act has resulted in the recovery of more than \$21 billion.

Under the **False Claims Act**, a relator must disclose his knowledge of the fraud to the government, then file the lawsuit under seal. The government can then investigate the merits of the relator’s case before the defendant receives formal notice of the suit. If the government finds the case has sufficient merit, it intervenes and prosecutes the case. The relator gets a smaller share of the recovery in a case in which the government intervenes (15-25%, as opposed to 25-30%), but the odds of success are greater, both because of the resources of the government and because the government can choose to intervene only in cases with a high probability of success.

More detailed information may be found at the website of **Taxpayers Against Fraud** (www.taf.org). Another useful overview is the article “Bad Mules” at <http://www.michbar.org/journal/pdf/pdf4article1590.pdf>

Quiz:

1. The False Claims Act was originally enacted during the_____.
a) Revolutionary War b) Civil War c) World War I d) World War II
2. The principle that lets private citizens bring suit on behalf of the government is
a) qui tam b) pro se c) post hoc ergo propter hoc d) res ipsa loquitor
3. A relator in an FCA suit is also known as a
a) flautist b) whistleblower c) mule d) contractor

IRS SCAM

A client tried to file his tax return electronically only to receive an error message. Apparently someone else had used his name and social security number to file a federal income tax return. He was told by the IRS that they are aware of a scam in which a scammer uses someone else's name and social security number and uses a fake W-2 in order to file a tax return which results in a refund. The refund is requested in the form of a debit card, an option offered by IRS to low and middle-income earners.

What can you do about it? Call the U. S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Office of Investor Education and Assistance (202-551-6551) to find out if there is something, other than changing passwords and monitoring accounts regularly, that you can do to protect your brokerage accounts. **TIP:** We've even heard about scammers using their children's Social Security numbers so they can file income tax returns and get a refund.

What is the SEC's Office of Investor Education and Advocacy

The U. S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Office of Investor Education and Advocacy is dedicated to serving the needs of individual investors.

We provide a variety of services to address the problems and questions you may face as an investor. We cannot tell you what investments to make, but we can provide unbiased information on investment choices and on protecting yourself from securities fraud or abuse.

The Office of Investor Education and Advocacy has three main functional areas:

If you have suffered wrongdoing at the hands of a broker or investment adviser, the **Office of Investor Assistance** wants to hear from you. We will contact the firm, company or individual who is the subject of the complaint to find out what happened. Sometimes, this results in a satisfactory resolution of the complaint. Other times, it's unclear who is right and who is wrong. In that case, we let investors know their legal options and how they can pursue a resolution on their own.

We have a staff of dozens of investor assistance specialists nationwide who stand ready to help you. Each year, we receive tens of thousands of calls, e-mails, web-form submissions, and letters from investors who had complaints or questions.

Complaints are extremely important to us. You may think you're the only one experiencing a problem, but typically, you're not alone. Sometimes, it only takes one investor's complaint to trigger an investigation that exposes an illegal boiler-room operation, a Ponzi scheme, or an insider-trading ring. In recent years, investor complaints led, at least in part, to approximately 20% of all cases investigated by the SEC.

If you have any questions, comments or problems, don't hesitate to contact us through our [online complaint forms](#) or [question form](#) or our hotline, (800) SEC-0330 (toll-free in the U.S.) More information is available on [how we handle your complaints](#).

Our specialists also research and provide information, such as whether a broker or investment professional is properly licensed to do business with you, or whether a company is registered with the SEC. We field questions on a range of other topics, including the worth of old stock certificates, and what to expect from bankruptcies and reorganizations.

The Office of Investor Education carries out the SEC's investor education program. It produces and distributes information, including online and print publications, to help you become a better-educated investor. It participates in educational seminars and investor-oriented events, and offers an annual teacher training program in Washington, D.C., focused on financial education. In addition, the Office partners with federal agencies, state regulators, and others on investor literacy initiatives.

The Office of Policy reviews SEC action from the perspective of the individual investor, including conducting investor surveys and focus groups. It also plays a role in the Commission's efforts to help ensure that investor disclosures are written in plain English.

<http://www.sec.gov/investor/pubs/aboutoiea.htm>

SMP & CWAG Activities

Date	Activity	County
April 1	CWAG District 4 Meeting-Clarion Hotel (formerly Holiday Inn)-Green Bay	Brown
April 2	3 rd Annual Community Health and Wellness Expo-New Richmond	St. Croix
April 5	SHIP Benefits Training Washington Park Senior Center-Milwaukee	Milwaukee
April 6	Medicare Fraud WI SMP – League of Women Voters-Janesville	Rock
April 8	CWAG District 1 Meeting-Madison Senior Center-Madison	Dane
April 9	Baby Boomer Fest-Madison	Dane
April 12	SHIP Benefits Training West Allis Senior Center	Milwaukee
April 12	SMP presentation-10 th Ave. Apts.-Wisconsin Rapids	Wood
April 13	SMP Presentation to Native American Rights Fund Group-La Crosse	La Crosse
April 15	CWAG District 2B Meeting, ADRC of Waukesha County	Waukesha
April 17	50 Plus Senior Expo-Rice Lake	Barron
April 19	CWAG District 8 Meeting-Hayward	Sawyer
April 19	Oakwood Villa Health Fair & Presentation-Eau Claire	Eau Claire
April 26-30	Aging in America 2011-ASA/NCOA Joint Conference San Francisco	California
April 27	Senior Expo at the Whitehouse Inn-Richland Center	Richland
April 27	CWAG District 7 Meeting-ADRC Building-Wausau	Marathon
April 28	CWAG District 6 Meeting-Milltown Community Center	Polk
April 28	20 th Annual 50 Plus Lifestyle & Retirement Show at Mayfair Mall	Milwaukee
April 29	Coulee Region RSVP Wellness Expo-La Crosse	La Crosse
May 2	25 th Annual State Conference on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders-Kalihari Resort & Convention Center-Wisconsin Dells	Sauk
May 3	SMP Presentation-River Falls Hospital Auxiliary Luncheon-River Falls	Pierce
May 3	SMP Presentation to Women's Group-Shawano County Pavilion	Shawano
May 3	SMP Presentation at the Shawano Public Library	Shawano May
May 4	RSVP Meeting-WI Volunteer Coordinators Conference-Milwaukee	Milwaukee
May 4	SMP Volunteer Foundations Training-Madison	Dane
May 5	9 th Annual Renaissance Experience Expo 2011-Janesville	Rock
May 4-6	Wisconsin Volunteer Coordinators Conference-Milwaukee	Milwaukee
May 9	Wesleyan Church SMP Presentation-Eau Claire	Eau Claire
May 10	SMP Presentation-Milwaukee Jewish Men's Club	Milwaukee
May 11	2 nd Annual Wisconsin Women's Health Policy Summit-Madison	Dane
May 19	Vital Aging Conference Booth-La Crosse	La Crosse
May 20	6 th Annual Multicultural Senior Health Fair-Madison	Dane
May 21-22	CWAG Annual Convention-Madison	Dane
May 25	Manitowoc County Health Fair-Manitowoc	Manitowoc
June 6	Neenah-Menasha Kiwanis group presentation	Winnebago
June 7	SMP Presentation-Menomonee Falls Library	Waukesha

June 14	9 th Annual Ozaukee County Senior Conference-Grafton	Ozaukee
June 21	SMP Foundations Volunteer Training-Two Rivers	Manitowoc
June 23	Preventing Elder Fraud-Froedtert Health Community Memorial Hospital	Waukesha
July 12-14	Wisconsin Farm Technology Days-Marshfield	Marathon
July 13-17	La Crosse County Interstate Fair-West Salem	La Crosse
August 9-11	National SMP (Senior Medicare Patrol) Conference-Washington DC	
October 11	23 rd Colloquium on Aging Conference & Health & Resource Fair	Dane

We are always looking for opportunities to support our colleagues in the aging network. Please contact Wisconsin SMP and let us know about your upcoming 2011 activities.

NIH-supported survey to study functional change in older adults

Medicare beneficiaries will be invited to participate in long-term study

Thousands of Medicare beneficiaries will receive an invitation in May to be part of a special study looking at the impact of age-related changes on functional ability. The National Health and Aging Trends Study (NHATS) will be seeking some 9,000 people aged 65 and older to participate in this long-term study, funded by the National

Institute on Aging (NIA), part of the National Institutes of Health. NHATS is led by Judith Kasper, Ph.D., of John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore.

NHATS will examine how the daily lives of older adults change as they age. This research will help scientists understand the social and economic consequences of late-life disability for individuals, families, and society. NHATS will complement and extend the findings of the National Long-Term Care Survey, a study supported by NIA from 1987-2006, which found that the level of disability among older people declined significantly between 1982 and 2004/2005.

"Many factors affect an older person's ability to function effectively and live independently," said NIA Director Richard J. Hodes, M.D. "NHATS is designed to help us understand the contributions of these factors to trends in the prevalence, onset and recovery from functional limitations."

As they age, many people experience problems in caring for themselves. These limitations are typically measured by the need for help in activities of daily living such as walking, dressing, and getting into and out of bed. Instrumental activities of daily living, such as preparing a hot meal, making telephone calls, and managing money, are associated with the ability to live independently. NHATS will measure participants' abilities to perform these activities and ask them about their need for assistance in carrying out these tasks. Changes in living arrangements, medical and health care needs, and individual well-being also will be measured during the study.

"The recently observed trend toward decreasing rates of disability identified by the National Long Term Care Survey and other national surveys may have leveled off, and this has serious implications," said Richard Suzman, Ph.D., director of NIA's Division of Behavioral and Social Research, which is funding the NHATS study. "Inability to live independently will add to costs for long-term care and nursing home stays, and reduce well-being among older people. This poses additional challenges for the aging of the baby boom. It's critical to track the trend and understand its dynamics."

NHATS will develop a nationally representative sample of Americans age 65 and older, selected at random from Medicare enrollees. Study participants will be interviewed in person in 2011 for the baseline sample and then once a year. Researchers will also conduct short tests of function and physical performance.

“We are sending information to selected Medicare beneficiaries in May,” said Kasper. “We hope that the people we ask to participate will be able to join and contribute to this important study.”

A survey of the family members and friends who help NHATS participants is being supported by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, which, along with NIH, is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The NIA leads the federal government effort conducting and supporting research on aging and the health and well-being of older people. The Institute’s broad scientific program seeks to understand the nature of aging and to extend the healthy, active years of life. For more information on research, aging, and health, go to www.nia.nih.gov.

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov

FRAUD ALERT – ELECTRONIC VERSION

In previous issues, we told you that Wisconsin SMP *Fraud Alert* will be sent electronically unless we receive a “request for a paper copy” from you.

Contact Patti Wiersma at pwiersma@cwag.org,
giving her your e-mail address,
to add to our list.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Check out the Wisconsin SMP web site
www.wisconsinsmp.org

You Can also Access Our Publication by visiting our web site www.wisconsinsmp.org
Or you can visit the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups web site www.cwag.org
Click on Publications then click on Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) and scroll down
and click on the edition you wish to view.

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