



UNDERSTANDING HEALTH INSURANCE

BY IRENE C. CARD and BETSY D. CHANDLER

MORE ON OPEN ENROLLMENT FOR SENIORS

The purpose of this article is to lessen the confusion and make it easier for folks on Medicare to understand open enrollment and if there is any action required on their parts. Open enrollment runs from October 15th through December 7th.

First - Original Medicare, Parts A and B, are good for the rest of your life. No annual action needed on your part.

Second – Open enrollment does not apply to your Medigap policies. You can change a Medigap policy at any time but there is no need to change your coverage if your current plan is working for you. If the premium goes up too high, you can do a bit of shopping or call our office for premium comparisons. Most companies will require you to answer some health questions before they will issue a new policy for you. Horizon BCBSNJ does not ask any health questions.

Third – Open enrollment really pertains to Medicare Advantage Plans and Part D, the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit. If you have a Medicare Advantage Plan and if you don't like the Plan that you have, during Open Enrollment October 15 through December 7th, you can switch to another Medicare Advantage plan if you have been enrolled in a Medicare Advantage Plan for more than one year. Or, you can switch to a Medigap policy if you can answer the health questions.

If your Medicare Advantage Plan leaves the area or if you leave the area that it covers (i.e., moving from Florida to NJ), you can switch to another Medicare Advantage Plan or a Medigap policy with no questions asked about your health. It is what we call "guarantee issue".

If you are within the first 12 months of owning a Medicare Advantage Plan and if you don't like it, you can drop it anytime within the first 12 months. If you miss this window of opportunity, the government has extended a new period from January 1 through February 14th to disenroll in your Medicare Advantage Plan and purchase a Medigap policy but it is not guarantee issue. You must be able to answer the health questions.

Fourth - Open enrollment from October 15 through December 7th applies to your Part D Medicare Prescription Drug Plan. If the Plan you have is working, no action is required on your part. You can keep what you have and pay the new premium for 2012. There is no paperwork needed on your part. I like to say that if it isn't broken, don't fix it. If you are not satisfied with your current plan (perhaps you went on more drugs this year and they may not be covered by your current plan), now is the time to study the plans available and make a change which will be effective January 1st.

Irene Card & Betsy Chandler are licensed insurance professionals working at MIC Insurance Services, a health insurance services company. If you have questions relative to this column or other related topics, we invite you to call (973) 492-2828. You may also access our library of past columns on our web site: www.micinsurance.com.

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