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Medicare Part D: Are We Done Yet?? **Margie Metzler**

July 21, 2006

The deadline for signing up for Medicare Part D has come and gone, and some people may be asking if we are done with this abominable legislation yet. The answer, of course, is a resounding **NO!** If anything, our work has just started. We as Gray Panthers still want what we deserve: a prescription drug plan that:

- Is simple to navigate
- Offers drugs at negotiated prices
- Won't change your premiums, co-pays, deductibles or formularies at will
- Has your best interests rather than those of insurance companies or big PhRMA as its primary goal

A lot has happened since May 15:

- The GAO (General Accounting Office), which is a nonpartisan arm of Congress, has released a [major study showing that Medicare prescription drug plans generally provided incomplete and inaccurate information to callers](#) who asked questions about the new benefit. They placed 900 calls and found that *one third of the calls gave inaccurate or incomplete information, 22% of the responses were inaccurate, 29% were incomplete, and no answers were provide to the rest.* Two of the companies gave inaccurate or incomplete information at least 75% of the time.
- [The Bush administration is planning sweeping changes in Medicare payments](#) that could cut payments by 20 percent for many complex treatments and new technologies. A coalition of patient organizations has told the government in a letter that the new system “could have a devastating impact on payment for critical treatments for seriously ill patients, with reimbursement for some essential procedures cut as much as 30 percent.”
- Millions of seniors, many of whom said that the plan was working well for them, [have since hit the Donut Hole](#), a period of time after your drug bills reach \$2250, when you must pay 100% of your prescription costs while still paying premiums, until your out-of-pockets costs reach \$5100.
- [The pharmaceutical industry is beginning to reap a windfall](#) from drugs for poor people. This windfall, which is estimated at as much as \$2 billion or more this year, results from the transfer of millions of low-income people into Medicare Part D. Under the new program, insurers, and eventually the taxpayer, pay much higher prices because of the provision in the bill that Medicare as a whole cannot negotiate for lower prices. We are already seeing sales of certain drugs go up as such as 33%, while prices have increased an average of 3.7% since January of 2006.

- As of this writing, [37 bills have been put forward to make corrective changes](#) to Medicare Part D. Every single one of them is now languishing in committee *because the heads of those committees are not friendly to such changes!*

So what can we do about all of this?

First, we must continue to put the pressure on all candidates, particularly those running for Congress, to support this legislation. And we must refuse to vote for those candidates who still support Medicare Part D. As always, we ask you to write letters to the editor, attend candidates meetings and speak up, and write to your Senators and Congresspeople.

Secondly, we are stepping up our postcard campaign, “PhRMA got the DONUT...we got the hole.” Gray Panthers nationally has distributed over 12,000 postcards, and we will get more out. (Just ask and ye shall receive!) But we have also ordered some smaller cards, cards that perfectly fit a contribution envelope from a candidate, so you can write a note that says something like “We’ll contribute when you take action to fix Medicare Part D.”

And lastly, we continue to hammer home the message out there, but we would love your input as to other places we can use our presentation.