

Ask The Welfare Fund
November 2007

The question and answer regarding purchase of up to a 90-day supply of medications at a local pharmacy for those retirees enrolled in the GHI Enhanced Medicare Part-D plan has really hit a nerve for many of our members. Several have called to say that they too have experienced problems with the Express Scripts mail-order delivery service, and that they were relieved to learn that they could buy them locally. One retiree, however, called to say that her local pharmacy, an independent, locally-owned would only provided a 30-day supply, even though the plan allowed for a 90-day supply, due to the excessive delay in their being paid by Express Scripts. This indicates yet another problem with the way the Medicare Part-D plan was structured, again providing no increased coverage or benefits to those who had previously had a prescription drug plan. As a result, if you are Medicare eligible and your plan allows you to purchase a 90-day supply, ask the pharmacy if they will fill a 90-day prescription before you get one from your doctor.

Question: I am an Assistant Principal, and I have set money aside in a flex spending account with the city. My son is 27 years old, and still in graduate school. Since an individual health plan is so expensive, I'd like to just use my flex spending account to pay for his medical expenses. How can I do this?

Answer: I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you cannot use your flex-spending account in this fashion, Flex spending accounts can only be used to pay excess medical costs for those who are covered by a city-provided health plan. Flex spending accounts provide a way to reduce taxable income, but any funds not used by the end of the year are lost and not refunded by the city. Please give me a call if you would like further information on flex-spending accounts.

Question: I am a retired principal, and recently needed a hearing aid. I received my voucher and list of participating providers from the welfare fund, and went to one of the participating stores. When I produced the voucher, and told the store it was worth \$ 600 and that they would get the money from the corporate location, they insisted I pay the full amount and submit the voucher myself. Can they do this? It doesn't make sense!

Answer: You are correct, not only does it not make sense, they cannot refuse to honor the voucher if they are a participating provider. We have had several other cases recently where members have submitted vouchers from participating providers to us after paying the entire amount for the device. If this happens again, please give us a call before paying the provider, and we will refer the store to the provider network. Stores join a network to benefit from being on a participating panel and having the network advertise for them. The network keeps a small amount from each voucher to help pay for the advertising and operational expenses, and the store you went to is trying to benefit from the advertising without paying the network.