



CURxED Program Guides Seniors Through Medicare Maze

An effort to help New York senior citizens wade through the myriad of choices in Medicare's prescription drug benefit has expanded from a pilot project in only five counties to a statewide effort reaching all of New York's 57 counties.

The program—called Cornell University Resource Education on Medicare Part D or CURxED—offers clear, unbiased information to help eligible residents choose which Medicare drug plan is best for them. In New York alone, three million eligible residents have to choose from 57 different plans—all with different drug prices, deductibles, premiums, and pharmacy networks.

The core of the program is a set of thick, white binders filled with lists of prices for nearly every prescription medicine available in the United States. It also offers computer tutorials, public awareness presentations, and a newsletter on Medicare Part D policy updates.

This fall, CURxED will again distribute updated information on Medicare plans to each of New York's 57 counties. The binders go to Health Insurance Information, Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP) coordinators—community educators sponsored by the New York State Office for the Aging to help older adults make decision about their health insurance. CURxED works closely with HIICAP to reach senior citizens.

The concept for CURxED came from the research of Kosali Simon, assistant professor in the Department of Policy Analysis and Management. She was setting up a project on Medicare Part D for her undergraduate health economics class when she realized she could

compile the same information to help senior citizens.

“What's clear is these are difficult choices that seniors need help with,” Simon said. “What we wanted to do is make sure we're not replicating resources that are already out there. We've consistently found there is no other resource like this.”

In New York, the program is making a real impact for many seniors. In a recent survey, program manager Robert Harris received positive feedback from the majority of community educators who participate in the program.

“The materials make it easier for seniors to get the Medicare Part D information, said Sarah Jane Blake, the HIICAP coordinator for Tompkins County. “Being able to show the information on paper rather than on a computer screen seems to make the process go smoother and it increases the likelihood that people who need to get into a plan will get a good fit.” ● ● ●

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