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Prescription drug coverage popular

By MICHAEL MARCHAND
CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt announced that more than 1.4 million beneficiaries have enrolled in Medicare's Part D program since June 2006, bringing the total number of people with Medicare now receiving comprehensive prescription drug coverage to more than 39 million.

In Region 10, encompassing Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington, the number of additional beneficiaries who have enrolled over the same period of time was nearly 56,000, bringing the total number of people in the region now with Medicare coverage to 1.27 million.

December 31, 2006, marked the end of a 45-day open enrollment period, the second successful open enrollment period for Part D. Beneficiaries eligible for the low-income subsidy and those aging into the Medicare program can enroll without penalty in 2007.

Washington state saw an increase of 24,376 new beneficiaries to bring the total number of beneficiaries receiving Medicare Part D coverage to 647,097. Oregon increased by 24,151 beneficiaries to 432,091 with Idaho increasing by 5,478 to 148,714 and Alaska from 1,811 to 42,693.

The second enrollment period was preceded by a multi-faceted outreach campaign nationally and locally to encourage beneficiaries to compare their 2006 plans with 2007 plan options in order to make a confident decision in health and drug coverage plan selection. This effort included 12,700 events coordinated with 40,000 partners in hundreds of cities across the nation.

About 88.5 percent of all beneficiaries who enrolled in a prescription drug plan for 2007 chose a plan that offers coverage other than the standard benefit, such as no deductible or coverage in the "donut hole." Most beneficiaries who enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans are also getting more comprehensive drug coverage than the standard plan.

◆ See DRUG p. 6

HAVE FUN! Join the

Obsidians

on the



By DAVID R. NEWMAN

Visit the web site for the Eugene-based Obsidians outdoor recreation group (www.obsidians.org), and a wide range of outdoor activities beckon.

As the group's trip committee lyricaly lists it on the web site, "We hike the trails through deep forest or across lava beds, visit wilderness lakes, climb up rocky crags to high promontories, saunter along ocean beaches, camp near glacier-fed torrents, or stand in admiration of flower-filled mountain meadows."

There's more: "The Obsidian Trips Committee schedules trips and outings the year round. These vary from easy afternoon walks to strenuous hikes and overnight backpacks. When the snow begins to fly in the high country, our thoughts turn to cross country skiing and other outdoor winter sports. In all these activities, the ultimate objective is to explore the more scenic areas of our environment and savor to the fullest the aesthetic experience of wildness."

The Obsidians sometimes go far afield. For example, last year, some members went along on a different mountain-climbing group's trip to Nepal and a trek near Mt. Everest. This included a 75-year-old Obsidian member.

Closer to home, the Obsidians maintain area hiking trails, put on an annual summer camp, and have a variety of social events. Hence, this is "an outdoor club, so you have to have a certain level of fitness," as current president, John Pegg, explains.

Still, there's a gentler side to this group, originally organized in 1927. Here's why: Some years ago, as the members started aging, they still wanted to participate in outdoor activities, so they started taking bus trips to various locations.

Thus, says Pegg, these days while it's a club "for all age groups, right now we are tending toward the older side."

Liz Reanier is one of five bus trip coordinators. Talk to her and she'll tell you of a variety of bus trips coming up this year. Open to anyone, the trips do however indeed attract older members of the club (and non-members as well). As for physical condition, bus-trippers "can be ambulatory or use a walker or a

wheelchair; but they need to be able to get on and off the bus," she explains. One aim of the trips: "to study history, geology and nature in all of its forms."

Bus trips range from day-long jaunts to week-long adventures. Last year, one of the "big trips" was to Yosemite, a six-day venture that included stops at Mt. Lassen and Mt. Shasta and the game refuge near Klamath Falls.

On March 21, a trip labeled "a day in country" will take in the Harrisburg museum, a Junction City historical home, the Long Tom trail and a vineyard.

One big trip this year ("it's already technically full," says Reanier) is a June 24-29 trip to the West side of Vancouver Island in Canada. Cost of the trip is \$710, including lodging, admissions, etc.

A trip scheduled for May 16-17 is going to Washington state and includes a stop at Wolf Haven International, a stop at the Tacoma glass museum, and a wildlife safari.

A one-day trip in July ("bring lunch boxes") goes up the McKenzie River and over to Smith Rock and the headwaters of the Metolius River.

Trip coordinator Reanier says that there are usually 24 to 40 participants on the bus trips, with costs varying, but generally ranging from \$30 and up,

sometimes depending upon whether or not food is provided.

For more information about Obsidian bus trips, check the current Obsidian calendar on-line at www.Obsidians.org or call Liz Reanier at 687-1925.



Liz Reanier, one of the Obsidian bus trip coordinators, holds a five-week old Siberian tiger kitten at one of the group's trips to the Wild Game Park near Bandon.

photos courtesy LIZ REANIER



Ewart Baldwin enjoys a walk at the Sequoia National Park, south of Yosemite National Park.

Retirement living at your fingertips!
Turn to p. 9 and let your fingers do the walking as you go on a self-guided tour of retirement facilities in your area.