

# Senior Physicians Group

American Medical Association ■ Summer update 2006

## The ABCs of Medicare Part D

Insight into Medicare's largest expansion in four decades

Perhaps no other Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) undertaking has garnered as much attention as the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit, which officially began on Jan. 1 this year.

"This was the largest change in Medicare since 1965," said Jeffrey Kelman, MD, chief medical officer of the CMS Center for Beneficiary Choices. "It involved adding a new benefit that would be open to all 43 million Medicare beneficiaries, across all 50 states and the territories."

The new benefit has generated a great deal of media attention, in part due to initial glitches in the implementation process, as well as the program's complexity and overall cost. Because the new program touches senior physicians both as

patients and as doctors, the AMA Senior Physicians Group hosted an educational session on the topic at its annual meeting in June, featuring Dr. Kelman and Leslie B. Fried, director of the Medicare Advocacy Project, a collaboration of the Alzheimer's Association and the American Bar Association's Commission on Legal Problems of the Elderly.

Fried is a member of a working group formed by the AMA that has worked with Dr. Kelman and other CMS officials to resolve some of the most serious implementation problems, particularly those associated with plan denials and prior authorization requirements. During her frank overview of the benefit, she explained how the large number of plans in each state, differing in both coverage and design, was a source of confusion for some seniors. She also discussed several problems with the enrollment process for the program's subsidy for patients who have low incomes.

Dr. Kelman pointed out that Part D is provided by independent prescription drug plans (PDPs) and that there are 34 PDP regions. During the mandated open-bidding process, each plan was asked to submit an estimated cost to provide the coverage in each region. The large number of plans submitting bids created many more choices for seniors than was initially expected, but it also has driven average monthly premiums down, he said.



Dr. Kelman explained how the most extensive benefits of the prescription drug program go to Medicaid and low-income patients. The Part D program also includes a catastrophic benefit for people who have very high drug costs, and a standard benefit available to all Medicare beneficiaries.

"Without Part D, we would still have a lot of seniors on Medicare who don't have drug coverage," he said. "Nobody disagrees that making drugs more affordable improves [patient] compliance, and compliance improves health care." ■

### Let's branch out

We're looking to forge a network with other groups of senior physicians, perhaps at the local or state level, to collaborate and share ideas. The Retired Physicians Section of the Louisiana State Medical Society is one potential partner. Know of any others?

Send a quick e-mail to [spg@ama-assn.org](mailto:spg@ama-assn.org) or call (312) 464-5523 and let us know. ■

# 50-year tribute to expand

Five decades in medicine is a long time, especially during this era of rapid advancements in medical technology and swirling changes in the business and practice of medicine. As the AMA embarks on efforts to better understand the needs of senior physicians, now is the time to enhance the AMA's recognition and celebration of these physicians.

That's why the AMA Office of Senior Physicians Services recently made the decision to expand the group's long-standing recognition program for 50-year honorees into a yearlong series of events and programs.

The centerpiece of the program will remain the 50-Year Anniversary Luncheon, which the AMA-SPG has hosted at the AMA Annual Meeting for the past several years. As always, all AMA members and their families are welcome to attend the luncheon and join in the celebration.

This year's luncheon included an engaging oral history program featuring interviews with members conducted by Chicago History Museum curator Marie Scatena.



AMA-SPG Immediate Past Chair Albert J. Miller, MD, is shown here at the 50-Year Anniversary Luncheon in June.

The celebration also will include a special educational trip for 50-year honorees through Italy's Tuscany region, organized by one of the AMA-SPG's travel partners (see story, page 3). This year's trip, the cruise *Discovering Lake Michigan*, aboard the *Nantucket Clipper*, sailed in August. The trip is open to all members of the AMA and their families.

For the growing number of senior physicians who use e-mail to communicate with grandchildren and other loved ones, the AMA-SPG will establish an e-mail discussion group for celebrators to share anecdotes and perhaps reconnect with colleagues from medical school or residency. And the AMA-SPG Web page at [www.ama-assn.org/go/spg](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/spg) will include a section with profiles and photographs of honorees.

The AMA-SPG Governing Council is committed to making the yearlong celebration successful. To that end, all physicians celebrating their 50th anniversary in medicine will be mailed materials at the beginning of the year inviting them to these events. As in previous years, the AMA will also send honorees a certificate and lapel pin.

But the most effective form of recruitment is personal in nature. Do you have friends or colleagues who will celebrate their 50-year milestone soon? If so, let them know about the AMA-SPG. They'll thank you for it. ■

## New award honors volunteerism

A newly established honor, the Jack B. McConnell, MD, Award for Excellence in Volunteerism, recognizes the work of a senior physician who has demonstrated his or her commitment to health care access by assisting underserved patients in the United States.

Anne Louise Barlow, MD, chair of the American Women's Hospitals Service, American Medical Women's Association, was the first recipient of the award in 2005. In a career that has spanned more than 55 years, international borders and count-

less positions, Dr. Barlow has never wavered from her mission to help those who cannot help themselves. She helped create the AMA-SPG and was chair of its governing council for two decades. In this position, she established the AMA-SPG as a major advocate of physician volunteerism.

The annual award is part of the AMA Foundation's Excellence in Medicine Awards program and is presented in association with the Pfizer Medical Humanities Initiative.

Nominations for this year's award are due Dec. 1. The recipient

will be honored at the Excellence in Medicine Awards banquet tentatively scheduled for February 2007 in Washington, D.C.

If you know a senior physician who deserves to be recognized, please call Carrie Waller, AMA Special Groups, at (312) 464-4546 for details on how to nominate a candidate. ■

Are you interested in medical volunteering? Visit the AMA-SPG Web site at [www.ama-assn.org/go/spg](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/spg) for resources to get started and important factors to keep in mind.

# Take a unique trip in 2007

Have you always wanted to sip wine in Tuscany? Or dig your toes in the white sand beaches of the U.S. Virgin Islands? The AMA-SPG offers more than a dozen travel and educational program opportunities annually through two travel partners, INTRAV and AHI Travel. As a member of the AMA-SPG, you can make these dreams happen.

Those celebrating a major anniversary in 2007 should consider joining colleagues for a trip through Tuscany Oct. 21–29, 2007, during AHI's Chianti in a Tuscan Villa



Trips through Italy have always been popular among members of the AMA-SPG.

program. The trip is part of AMA-SPG's celebration for those marking their 50th anniversary of medical school graduation. Participants will travel through Italy's beautiful Tuscan hill country from Marciaccia to Pisa. Additional stops include Florence, Lucca, San Gimignano and Colle di Val d'Elsa, a major center for the art of producing handcrafted crystal. Navigate narrow cobblestone streets lined with Gothic buildings in Siena and visit the city's magnificent *duomo*.

Live *la dolce vita* and discover two of Italy's most remarkable regions on another popular AHI program. The Italy Sorrento and Orvieto, trip May 20–31, 2007, takes you through coastal Campania and bucolic Umbria. The trip originates in cliff-top Sorrento and takes you along the Amalfi Coast to the town of Positano, whose unique vertical cityscape has inspired artists and writers alike. Explore ruins once buried in the volcanic ash of Mount Vesuvius when you visit Pompeii, then enjoy the terraced hillsides of the Isle of Capri. Other stops include Orvieto, with its marvelous 12th-century *duomo*, Perugia, an ancient Etruscan city-state, and medieval Assisi, home to



Pisa is among the many attractions on next year's 50-year celebration trip.

the exquisite Basilica of St. Francis. Finally, experience the artistic and architectural heritage of Florence. This trip has a 40-person limit and will fill up early, so book your reservations soon.

If you're looking to get away this winter, start the new year off right and book your place on a cruise to the Panama Canal Jan. 20–31, 2007. After you set sail on the mighty Atlantic Ocean from Miami, you will head to St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Other stops along the Caribbean Sea include the volcanic island of St. Barths, French West Indies, the lush tropical paradise of St. Kitts, Leeward Islands and Aruba. Then relax as the vessel is gently raised and lowered through the six locks of the Panama Canal, one of the world's truly fabulous feats of engineering. Finally, you will ride the calm waters of the Pacific Ocean to your last port of call, beautiful Caldera, Costa Rica. ■

## Share your voice at local roundtables

Do you have an idea you really want to share? AMA Member Connect® Roundtables are an excellent way to make your opinions heard. Roundtables put AMA members in touch with AMA leaders to ask questions and share ideas about how the AMA can best serve its members. The small, informal group settings foster lively discussions on a range of topics, and senior

physicians are invited to participate. A few upcoming events include:

- Sept. 19—Milwaukee
- Sept. 20—Marshfield, Wis.
- Oct. 24—Jackson, Miss.
- Oct. 26—Baton Rouge, La.

Call (800) 621-8335 or visit [www.ama-assn.org/go/roundtables](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/roundtables) to learn more or RSVP. ■

Visit the AMA-SPG Web site at [www.ama-assn.org/go/spg](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/spg) for more information on our travel programs. Please note that dates and itineraries are subject to change.



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Visit the **AMA-SPG Web site** at  
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**E-mail the 2006–2007 AMA Senior Physicians Group Governing Council**

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## Still a member?

The AMA-SPG recently mailed out membership applications that provide an overview of the group's programs and benefits. Did you get yours? The membership fee is \$30 per year and is payable by check or credit card. The fee supports continued communication with colleagues, attention to issues that concern senior physicians such as licensure and liability for physician volunteers. It also enables the development of educational programs to help you stay involved with your profession.

Call (800) 262-3211, ext. 4539, if you have questions about the group or suggestions for activities. ■

# Big changes on the way

The AMA-SPG Governing Council is spearheading several major changes for the group, to bring the voice of senior physicians further into the policymaking process of the AMA.

After a series of strategic planning sessions, the governing council instituted several governance modifications and mandated term limits for governing council members and officers. The changes will allow more senior physicians to play a role in guiding the direction of the group and will ensure a constant source of new ideas and opportunities for senior physicians.

In addition, the governing council has moved its winter meeting to coincide with the AMA Interim Meeting, Nov. 11–14 at Bally's Las Vegas, where members will attend

reference committee hearings and AMA policymaking sessions. The governing council has submitted a discussion paper to the AMA Board of Trustees recommending substantive changes in the structure of the AMA-SPG and its broader role within the AMA.

If you are passionate about being a spokesperson for senior physicians and have experience in the AMA House of Delegates or the policymaking process, please consider submitting a nomination for one of two open seats on the AMA-SPG Governing Council. The nominating process begins in February 2007.

Send an e-mail to [carrie.waller@ama-assn.org](mailto:carrie.waller@ama-assn.org) or call (312) 464-4546 to learn more about this opportunity. ■