

# **LONG TERM CARE COORDINATING COUNCIL**

## **COMMUNITY MEETING ON MEDICARE PART D AND RIPAE**

**May 10, 2006**

### **Minutes**

#### **Lt. Gov. Charles Fogarty, Chairman -- Introductory Remarks**

**Chairman Fogarty opened the meeting by thanking Joan Crawley, Director of the Leon Mattheiu Senior Center, for hosting today's meeting. He noted that concerns for the impending Medicare Part D deadline and RIPAE's re-certification were what had brought the LTCCC there today to provide a public forum for elders to hear the latest information on the programs and offer their thoughts, concerns, and questions.**

**LTCCC members in attendance were: Senator Elizabeth Roberts**

**Lt. Gov. Charles Fogarty, Chairman Bill Jackson**

**Executive Director, Maureen Maignet Larry Grimaldi (rep. Dir. Russo)**

**Maria Barros Al Santos**

**Bob DiCenso Bonnie Sekeres**

**Jim Flanagan Susan Sweet**

**Kathy Heren (rep. Roberta Hawkins) Sister Marietta Walsh**

**Senator Elizabeth Roberts -- RIPAE Wrap-around legislation**

**Senator Roberts noted that the affordability of prescription drugs has been a big issue in RI and the state has been a leader in this area with the enactment of RIPAE many years ago, but that the new focus is to make sure that Medicare Part D does not make things worse. She noted that she has submitted legislation, along with Representative Ray Sullivan, which will provide for "wrap-around" coverage to work along with Medicare Part D to provide for coverage during gaps. She noted that twenty states are currently providing similar gap coverage and she sees no reason why RI can't do the same. She encouraged the seniors present to contact their legislators to request support for passage of this bill (S 2568 / H 6932)**

**Senator Roberts shared the story of her mother whose medical coverage had changed during a time that she was visiting out of state. She became ill but found that when she went to fill a prescription during this time, she was told her coverage did not cover**

**that medication, which cost \$1000.**

**Representative Eileen Naughton -- RIPAE Open Formulary legislation**  
**Representative Naughton announced that the House Finance Committee would be meeting to review the expenses associated with this legislation, which she introduced on behalf of the Lt. Governor. This legislation is intended to address the needs related to the "donut hole" as well as other issues, including the addition to the formulary of injectable drugs for Multiple Sclerosis, as these drugs make a great difference in these persons' quality of life.**

**Leon Mathieu Resource Staff**

**Georgiana Reis, Elder Care Specialist, shared some of the problems that some of the seniors that she has been working with have been experiencing. She noted:**

**Drugs are getting moved to different tier levels with their prices increasing**

**People are experiencing problems showing their deductible amounts and using their RIPAE cards to cover these amounts**

**Those being assisted by SS are experiencing delays getting information regarding prescription drug plans**

**Medicare/Medicaid "dual eligibles", some who have 20 medications, are being required to pay co-pays for their medications for the first time which is a significant financial barrier**

Many people are reaching their coverage gap (donut hole) after a short time (some 10-12 weeks) with no coverage during this gap  
Georgiana said she is excited about the wrap-around legislation, as she believes it will help to better assist these people.

Senior Agenda Consortium Consumer Representative –  
Mr. Savino Salerno

Mr. Salvino, 87 years old, asked how many of those in the audience had been experiencing problems with RIPAE, to which several raised their hands. He noted that he was scheduled to meet with Georgiana Reis for the 5th time to try to rectify the problems he has personally been having with RIPAE. He said RIPAE has served him well for many years and he loved it but now he is getting bills. He noted his dissatisfaction with Medicare Part D and said he would not have even signed up for it except that now he is losing money. In regard to Medicare Part D, Mr. Salvino said that Washington is trying to fix something that wasn't broke and they should just let RIPAE continue. He noted that he had met recently with Representative Costantino and even the representative was confused.

Chairman Fogarty noted the appropriateness of this meeting being held in Pawtucket as RIPAE's origins were here, largely through the efforts of former Representative Bill Durand. He recognized Susan Sweet (often referred to as the "Mother of RIPAE") for her advocacy efforts as well.

## **Senior Center Consumers**

**Dot Plante stated that she had recently signed up for Medicare Part D via an AARP plan. She said that previously her prescriptions were approximately \$30-40 but now they are \$70-80. She said she has gone off many of her medications because she cannot afford these costs. She says she does not like that she has been forced to sign up for something like this and the way this has all been done feels like Communism to her.**

**Stanley Loviak said he signed up for Medicare Part D (AARP plan) on November 29th. On January 5th, he had prescriptions filled and was erroneously charged \$150 but was told he would be reimbursed. To date, he said, he has not yet been reimbursed. Mr. Loviak said that when he went to refill his prescriptions a second time and inquired what the cost would be, he was again told it would be \$150, but he said this was not right. He said Joan Crawley has contacted the AARP plan provider to look into the matter but it has not yet been corrected. He noted that donut holes are supposed to be delicious, but this is more like a black hole and he "can't take it".**

**Provider – Kathleen Kelly, RI Assisted Living Association**

**Ms. Kelly began by stating that she represents seniors and those with disabilities who could not be here and who reside in assisted living facilities. She noted that her residents are experiencing problems similar to those shared previously; increases in payments for drugs, overpayments and problems with refunds but she wanted to bring attention to the problems that dual-eligibles are experiencing. She noted that these people live on either \$55 or \$100 per month and that**

previously, they were not charged co-pays for their medications. Now with the Medicare Part D plan, they are charged a \$3 co-pay per medication. She noted that this might not sound like a lot of money to people in Washington but said that this cost comes directly out of the person's \$55/100/month and they may have several medications to fill each month. She stated that this is wrong and needs to be fixed.

### **Open Comments from LTCCC members and community**

**Maria Barros, RN, stated that she has been providing home care services in Pawtucket for the past 30 years. She noted that many of her clients are Portuguese and Spanish-speaking and used home remedies for much of their lives but now that they are older, are needing medications that often carry a \$3 co-pay and that has been burdensome. She said many are going without their medications because of it and some are even ending up in the hospital. She asked what are we saving in all of this and stated that the answer is the system needs to be changed.**

**Susan Sweet acknowledged that there are a lot of problems with Medicare Part D but said that changes need to be made on the Federal Level. She also suggested that people contact their local legislators to voice their support for passage of the Wrap-Around legislation noting that this bill won't fix Medicare Part D but will make it easier to get through the difficult times. Ms. Sweet noted that we are actually better off than the states that didn't already have a state prescription assistance program in place, but we are worse off than**

many of those other states that previously did have a state program. Bonnie Sekeres, Director of Shalom Housing, Warwick, asked the audience how many of them had applied for re-certification for RIPAE to which several raised their hands. She then asked how many had received letters telling them that they are ineligible, to which several again raised their hands. She stated that there is a glitch in the system and many people are eligible and said that representatives from DEA can assist in following up to determine if a person is eligible or not.

Joan Crawley, Director of the Leon Matthieu Senior Center, noted that if a person had re-applied to RIPAE and had received their card, a white card with black lettering on it, then that person is eligible and could disregard the letter that stated they were ineligible.

Ralph Rodrigues, DEA, stated that one of the reasons RI is having problems while other states are not is because we had a pre-existing state program. Many other states had nothing and they have gone from nothing to something. Mr. Rodrigues also noted that since Medicare Part D began, there have been many technical problems at the federal level and that this has not just been in RI but across the country. He said that even RIPAE has had problems in the past but much fewer. He noted that one frustrating thing they have dealt with in the RIPAE re-certification was the sending of 10-20,000 letters, noting it is hard to reach 20,000 people. He stated that if a person received the new card then they are eligible. He noted that starting

**July 1, they will be moving to a new computer system and believes that with that, there will hopefully be no more of these problems.**

**Larry Grimaldi, DEA, opened the floor for questions.**

**One senior asked if RIPAE will be providing retro-active payments to those who become re-certified after they have paid for medications to which Mr. Grimaldi answered, no, that there is no mechanism in place for reimbursement but he encouraged people to submit their prescription receipts, which they can get from their pharmacy, directly to their plan. He noted that, for people on RIPAE, DEA is doing one-on-one personal conferences with all those that call them to assist people with the process of getting money back from their plan.**

**Another senior asked why there is no cap for the costs of drugs to which Chairman Fogarty responded that there were bills passed in Congress that protected pharmacies from this. He noted these bills also prohibit the government from receiving discounts for bulk orders. He said that the pharmaceutical industry were the ones who basically wrote the bill. When asked how this could be changed, Chairman Fogarty stated that a new bill would need to be introduced and would need the votes for passage.**

**Richard Bidwell from the Gray Panthers shared that he had attended a meeting at Blue Cross recently where he heard discussion about a new law in RI which prevents any health plan from eliminating drugs from their formulary to which Chairman Fogarty responded that this is a "federal guidance" which states that changes to Part D formularies can only be made once a year.**



**Susan Sweet reminded the seniors present that if any of them are presently covered under a union, retirement or Veteran's Administration health plan, they should check to see if the plan they currently have is considered "creditable coverage" - for if they have "creditable coverage" they do not need to sign up for a Medicare Part D plan. She also encouraged anyone who is a veteran, but who has not yet applied for veteran's benefits, to look into the matter.**

## **9. Adjournment**

**Chairman Fogarty concluded the meeting by asking all Long Term Care Coordinating Council members to stand and be recognized. He thanked Joan Crowley for her hospitality once again and she thanked the Pawtucket Senior Center Advisory Council.**