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Transcript for 'Ohana Caregivers HMSA Video "Medical Insurance Fraud"  
May 2008

♪ Music ♪

(Lori Yancura)

Those of us who live in Hawai'i often say that we live in paradise. Our state is blessed with a bounty of natural resources and an amazing mix of people and cultures. However even paradise has its share of problems.

My name is Lori Yancura and I'm an assistant professor in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences and the College of Tropical Agriculture in Human Resources at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. My job is to study the problems that affect older adults in Hawai'i and to look for solutions to improve their health, well-being, and quality of life. Elders in our state are very fortunate because most people living in Hawai'i have a strong sense of family.

We believe in taking care of our kupuna. According to the National Family Caregivers Alliance there are over 100,000 family caregivers taking care of older family members in the State of Hawai'i. Because of the strong sense of family I believe the best solutions to problems faced by the older adults in Hawai'i are those that involve the entire family. One problem that elders in Hawai'i are currently facing is healthcare fraud. In Hawai'i, as well as nationally, approximately 10% of the money spent on the Medicare program is estimated to be lost due to healthcare fraud, waste, and abuse.

This comes out to about \$80,000,000 every year or \$861,000 every week, \$123,000 every day or \$85 each and every minute. This is a huge problem because that money could be used to provide better healthcare services for our kupuna. We started the Ohana Caregivers Project to find solutions to issues facing family caregivers in Hawai'i. One of the things we are interested in learning about is using the strengths of our families to help lessen or even eliminate the problem of healthcare fraud. In researching possible solutions we have decided to get advice from experts and the following series of programs will explore some solutions to this problem and talk about specific ways that family caregivers can help keep their loved ones safe.

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Many family caregivers feel that healthcare insurance and billing are among the most confusing aspects of taking care of their loved ones. Caregivers are often overwhelmed with the day to day responsibilities of meeting their family members' physical needs. They don't have time to be both accountants and nurses. However insurance and billing are very important aspects of preventing healthcare fraud. In this part of our continuing series on helping family caregivers to prevent healthcare fraud for older adults in Hawai'i, Paul Goto and Margie Sasaki of HMSA will be providing some answers to questions that many caregivers have about healthcare insurance and billing.

(Paul Goto)

Hi Margie, I wanted to thank you for agreeing to drop by and talk to me today because I went to this conference and they were talking about fraud in healthcare and how it impacts especially seniors and I am really concerned with that because I am taking care of my mom's affairs now and making sure that she is taken care of, but there are some things that came up here that I kind of needed to know more about and one of the things I kind of wanted to know was why is that they stress with regard to senior citizens, seniors being impacted by fraud and abuse.

(Margie Sasaki)

Well as a whole elderly have more time on their hands. They are free to talk to people via the phone or go to free lunch seminars. They also don't realize that their Medicare card or their insurance card is like a charge card.

(Paul)

And what do you mean by that, by being like a charge card?

(Margie)

That if it got in the wrong hands of someone they could charge endless amounts of medical costs to their insurance carriers.

(Paul)

You mean whether or not my mom received the services?

(Margie)

Correct! They're trying to obtain their insurance numbers whether it be their Medicare or private insurance numbers. They are trying to obtain their insurance numbers so that they can possibly charge medical charges to their accounts.

(Paul)

One of the things I was wondering about is... you know how insurance plans you have some that have a lifetime limit of a \$1,000,000 some \$2,000,000 some it's even unlimited. Is that the kind of exposure that we're talking about as far as losses that can be incurred once someone gets access to your insurance information?

(Margie)

Absolutely, unless an insurer has a limitation on their system, the money that they could take from your plan would be endless.

(Paul)

Based on the maximum number of your benefits?

(Margie)

Yes.

(Paul)

So I can see why this is a really big problem. One of the things that I wasn't real clear about is they talked about this the being not just what local people talk about being a problem, but is it also a national problem that's what they were trying to explain to us as well and I didn't understand that completely.

(Margie)

Yes because medical costs everybody over \$2 trillion dollars a year. There's a lot of money to be abused.

(Paul)

I remember them mentioning that.

(Margie)

So there is an estimated \$240 billion a year on possible healthcare fraud.

(Paul)

There are particular things that we have to worry about with regard to things like getting called over the phone. My mom gets calls sometimes where she says I got a call from somebody and they want me to buy this extra insurance. Should that be a concern?

(Margie)

Yes, that should be a concern. I know that they do not like to be rude to people but they actually should just end the call with these types of people. Nobody would call you and ask you to buy products over the phone.

(Paul)

Now the other thing that I thought was very very interesting was that they started going through these examples of fraud schemes, which is something you'd never think about the schemes in other areas but certainly not the healthcare. They came up with these terms and I don't know exactly what they are so I just wanted to ask you about them and see what kinds of things I should be on the lookout for. One was talking about offering free services, medical services in exchange for health insurance information, health card information. What's that about?

(Margie)

Yes, if you ever take your mom to one of these free seminars be careful even if they offer the like free socks, if you go free shoes, but when you get there as part of the registration they want your insurance card numbers. The reason for that they're going to charge your insurance company for those services and not even the services she received. They're going for higher end products.

(Paul)

So that's kind what you're talking about once they have your insurance number it's like a credit card. They can submit claims to insurers or to Medicare or whoever you're covered by?

(Margie)

Yes. Correct.

(Paul)

If you were to recommend to me what we should do to protect that information what would you say?

(Margie)

I would say that if you had any supplies you needed, your physician, your mother's physician would be in charge of handling all that. Everything would be dictated through one of the physicians she sees. The prescriptions would be ordered. So when anybody offers you something free to come to, there is a gimmick usually behind it.

(Paul)

The other thing they talked about was Medicare Part D. It's that new Medicare drug program and they're talking about door-to-door sales and their prohibition against that. Why is that? Why is that prohibited?

(Margie)

Medicare did that to protect the elderly. So that if the elderly were interested in part d prescription they can contact the people who are carrying those plans and ask for a service representative to come to them versus someone showing up at the door. These salespeople are so smooth that if you let them inside they talk the elderly into things that they don't know what they are signing up for. They could actually forgo their own medical coverage that they are having now to sign up for a plan that they're not even interested in.

(Paul)

And that could happen without my mom even knowing that that was happening to her once they had her insurance information or Medicare information.

(Margie)

Right, and they would have her sign a paper that and she probably wouldn't even know what she is signing for. So my advice to that is don't even let them in the house. Take their card and tell them that you will call them later if you would like to schedule an appointment and then contact Medicare.

(Paul)

They talked about some prescription fraud and that was in relationship to Medicare Part D, the drug program and they talked about something called short fills. What is a short fill?

(Margie)

A short fill is when you go in for your medication, no matter how many prescriptions you either have the 30-day refills sometimes even 90 days depending on how many pills. If you're taking one pill everyday obviously for a month it will be 30 pills and if you took the time to count them and if you are mom's caregiver you are probably picking up their prescription for her and not your mother herself. So you would need to take the time and count the pills and see if you got all 30.

(Paul)

Would that be before I leave the pharmacy?

(Margie)

It's best suggested that before you leave the pharmacy so you could go back to the pharmacist and say excuse me you know I only count 27 pills or 28 pills.

(Paul)

And why would pharmacies if they were going to be intentionally do that, why would they do that?

(Margie)

They would do that because some of the medication today is over \$10 a pill, \$20 a pill and so if they just short changed everybody two or three pills it is significant dollars.

(Paul)

They would make a lot of money. Now if it were to happen maybe only once at a pharmacy that I usually go and pick up my mom's drugs at, should I think that that is a suspect pharmacy and they are committing fraud all the time?

(Margie)

No, errors happen but if you said you picked it up all the time and they are constantly short changing you...

(Paul)

Well there usually not. There was one instance that I think I can think of.

(Margie)

No, chances are that it was a human error.

(Paul)

OK. One thing they also talked about was DME supplies. What is that, DME?

(Margie)

A DME supply is like a wheelchair, a cane, a walker, something you need to help yourself... mobile, move around, walk around, or not yourself but your mother and oftentimes these are the subject of fraud.

(Paul)

And how does that happen?

(Margie)

It can even happen that your doctor can prescribe a cane for your mother and when you go there they can say you know she's eventually going to need a wheelchair. So why don't we just give her wheelchair now and you say is that OK and you say sure.

(Paul)

Even though the doctor didn't order it.

(Margie)

Correct.

(Paul)

And they are still able to file a claim for it and get paid for it. Wheelchair as opposed to a cane the one or walker or something.

(Margie)

Correct. They will try and chances are the claim could slide by.

(Paul)

One last thing what tips could you give me with regard to what do I have to be on the lookout for with regards to my mom's records or whatever to make sure that she isn't the victim of fraud or false billing?

(Margie)

Well you would be the gatekeeper of all of these records and just as an example I just gave you that if you knew that she was she was supposed to get a cane and you read you the report from the insurance carriers whether it be Medicare or commercial plans and read what the services were. See if you got those. See if any of the services you think are priced awful high in comparison to what you thought the services were because sometimes they're really difficult even for you to read versus your mom. They are very difficult to read and know sometimes exactly what the service is. So you can look at the cost at least that they were paid, the provider.

(Paul)

And would it be helpful but took notes on what I received from my mom on what kinds of services she got, would that be helpful?

(Margie)

Absolutely! It would be very helpful you to write that down one for more ways than one. You know more on what's going on with their health and you remember you remember what was done that day, what the physician said, what follow-up needed to be done. You can reflect back on those notes and know exactly what dates and times just in case you know you went to the doctors with her once in January and once in march but when you see the report come through you were actually billed for January, February, March, things of that nature.

(Paul)

And what which are we do if we think fraud has occurred?

(Margie)

If frauds occurred and if it is with an HMSA plan they do have some fraud numbers for commercial HMSA and for 65 C+ which has Medicare and the numbers on Oahu is 948-5166 and the neighbor island toll free number is 1-888-398-6445. And for Medicare only, if you have Medicare directly from Medicare call the office of the Inspector General at 1-800-447-8477.

(Paul)

That's great! You've been really helpful.  
Thank you Margie, appreciate it.

(Margie)

It was nice talking with you.

(Lori)

Some of these health scheme frauds are frightening aren't they? The take a lesson from that presentation was don't share your insurance number. Treat it like your Social Security or credit card number. Thieves can do quite a bit of damage if they know any of your personal numbers. You can contact HMSA or visit our Ohana Caregivers Project website for more information. That's [www.hawaii.edu/ohanacaregivers](http://www.hawaii.edu/ohanacaregivers). Thank you very much for watching. I hope that you can use your new knowledge to protect your loved ones from healthcare fraud.

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