

## GOODRIDDANCE 2020 and Happy New Year!!!

Wishing you all a healthy and happy New Year. Hopefully, it will be a year of many opportunities and happy memories. 2020 came with such high expectations: the start of a new decade and the year we all hoped to get everything we wanted. Instead, we have all become used to a new normal, which has made us more aware of the many things we have to be grateful for.

I cannot thank you all enough for your patience and understanding during this very difficult time. When I made the decision to meet virtually and/ or by phone towards the end of November, it impacted many of you. I am looking forward to seeing you all in person during next year's enrollment period.

## SUSAN's Winter Fun Trivia-

See if you can answer any of the following questions. You must read to the bottom to get the answers. Just for your info, I got them all wrong.

1. Which country owns every panda in the world?
2. What is the most common color of toilet paper in France?
3. Spinach is high in what mineral?
4. What is the total number of dots on a pair of dice?
5. Where would you find an ISBN number?

## UPCOMING WORKSHOP on SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE - - -

For the past several years, I have been extremely fortunate to have Elaine Cole, Public Affairs Specialist for the Social Security Administration, speak to my clients regarding the role that Social Security plays with Medicare, retirement benefits, how to apply, income related monthly adjustment amounts (IRMAA), and penalties. This year we will be having a virtual workshop

via ZOOM. **It will be held on Thursday, January 21<sup>st</sup> at 1 pm.** Feel free to share this information with anyone that you feel may be interested. Susan will also be sending emails regarding this. You would need to respond in advance for Susan to email you the zoom link to participate.

## MEDICARE CHANGES FOR 2021---

Every year Medicare changes their deductibles and premiums slightly. I will just highlight a few of these changes below:

Part B premium for 2021 is \$148.50 (this is up from \$144.60) Also, if you pay IRMAA (Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount), you will also see an increase based on your level.

Part B deductible in 2021 will be \$203 (this is up \$5 from \$198) Individuals who are enrolled in Medigap plans G and N will see this increase. For those of you on Medicare Advantage plans, you will not experience this change directly.

Since the pandemic, Medicare has been offering telehealth services.

As a result of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act, the Social Security Act received an amendment to allow all end-stage renal disease (ESRD) patients who are Medicare- eligible to enroll in Advantage plans in 2021. In the past, individuals with ESRD were not able to enroll in Medicare Advantage plans.

## ACA HEALTH INSURANCE (AFFORDABLE CARE ACT) -

As I mentioned in my previous newsletter, Pennsylvania switched to a state-based exchange, called Pennie. Ohio still uses the Federal marketplace at healthcare.gov. A few key things to think about when choosing health insurance:

Open enrollment period- usually between November 1<sup>st</sup> and December 15<sup>th</sup> of every year, and the new plan becomes effective January 1<sup>st</sup>. This is the time when anyone can enroll in health coverage, no questions asked. PA extended the open enrollment this year. This is not typical; it may be due to the change from the Federal to State based exchange. Outside of open enrollment, you would need to have a qualifying event to enroll in coverage. This is called a Special Enrollment Period (SEP). Examples of SEP include losing job-based coverage, cobra expiring, moving to a new state, etc. A proof of these qualifying events is also required.

You can either purchase health insurance directly through the insurance carrier or through the state or federal based marketplace. The reason you could choose to go through the marketplace is if you feel you might be eligible for financial assistance- tax credits and/or cost sharing subsidies. Premium tax credits are basically discounts on your monthly premium. These are given if your income is below the Federal Poverty level. Cost sharing subsidies help to reduce deductibles, copays, and coinsurance if you enroll in a silver plan.

Most of the plans offer different networks and different metal levels. The network would consist of the doctors, hospitals, etc. By enrolling in a narrow network, you would save money, but you would want to be sure that the physicians you care about participate. The broadest networks give you the best choice of providers but will be the most expensive.

Metal levels usually consist of Gold, Silver and Bronze categories. Gold plans have lower deductibles with higher monthly premiums. Silver is a good choice if you qualify for cost sharing. These plans have a slightly higher monthly premium and lower deductibles than bronze plans. Bronze plans are good for catastrophic coverage. They have the highest deductibles and lowest monthly premiums.

In addition to the network and the metal level, it is important to compare the various types of health insurance policies. Some plans offer HMO's, where you would have to stay in network except in the case of emergencies, PPO's give you out of network coverage for non-emergencies, but they tend to be more expensive. It is important to view your summary of benefits, which details all your costs. One important number to look at is your out-of-pocket costs, which is the total that you could potentially spend in a calendar year- it includes

your deductible, copayments, and coinsurance. Usually, the lower your premiums, the higher your out-of-pocket costs will be.

### Medicare Annual Enrollment-

Now that this period is over, I just wanted to review a few things, which may make it easier for next year. Remember, the Annual Enrollment period is from October 15<sup>th</sup> through December 7<sup>th</sup> of every year, and the new plans start on January 1<sup>st</sup>. I tend to get asked many questions during this time. There are a few things that I would like to clarify.

Annual Notice of Change (ANOC) is a booklet that is sent to you around mid-September to show the changes in the plans for the upcoming year. This only applies to Medicare Advantage and Prescription Drug plans. MEDIGAP plans are standardized and do not change from year to year so they do not send an ANOC.

With Medicare Advantage plans, sometimes providers (doctors, facilities, etc.) leave a network. **That is why it is extremely important to review from year to year to make sure your providers are still in your network.**

The same is true of prescription drugs- the list of medications covered (formulary) can change, as can the level of the medication (tiers). **I do recommend that all my Medicare clients create an account on [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov)** There is a way to input your medications, pharmacy, etc. and see all the different plan options for Medicare Advantage and Prescription Drug plans. This helps us during the enrollment period to see which plan might work best for you. This site also allows you to view past claims, print a Medicare card, etc. If you need help creating an account, please call my office and Susan will be happy to assist.

Prior to next year's Annual Enrollment Period (October 15<sup>th</sup> through December 7<sup>th</sup>), I will be sending information regarding how to check to see if your providers and/or prescriptions are still covered by your plan.

If you do not do anything during the Annual Enrollment period, your plans will automatically roll over into the new plan design the following year. However, if your plan is being discontinued, they will either map you into a different plan, or you will need to enroll in a new

plan, all of which will be explained in the Annual Notice of Change.

Advertisements- this year I received a lot of calls regarding television ads talking about getting \$144 back for your Medicare plan. Unfortunately, this was very confusing and misleading. They were referring to individuals who would qualify based on their income levels. It was more of a bait and switch tactic where they wanted you to call so they could enroll you in a different plan. If you feel that your income qualifies you for Medicaid, you may be eligible for other options.

Medicaid is also referred to as Medical Assistance. To check to see if you are eligible and to apply, please check out this website, [compass.state.pa.us](http://compass.state.pa.us) If this does apply to you, please call me and we can discuss in more detail. Eligibility for Medicaid is based on your modified adjusted gross income. This is something that you could apply for directly through the State. If you are found eligible, you would have a special enrollment period to change your Medicare plan.

#### ANSWERS TO TRIVIA QUESTIONS---

1. China
2. Pink
3. Iron
4. 42
5. On a book

Visit my updated website at  
[www.bluepeakinsurance.com](http://www.bluepeakinsurance.com)



**\*\*If you would rather receive the Newsletters via email, please let me know.**

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