

SCAMS REPORT

MILTON TOWNSHIP S.A.L.T. COUNCIL MEETING JANUARY 9, 2023

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Durable Medical Equipment (DME) Scam

Background: DME companies provide health care equipment prescribed by a practitioner for use in the home. The equipment is ordered for a specific purpose and is intended for repeated use. Examples are wheelchairs, walkers, braces, glucose monitors, hospital beds, nebulizers, commode chairs, and catheters. These devices enable patients to manage their illness or injury at home. Once a beneficiary's deductible has been satisfied, Medicare Part B typically pays 80% of the covered cost of DME.

How the scam works: You receive a telephone call from someone claiming to be from Medicare who says you're eligible for a "free" wheelchair, brace, or other device. The caller tells you that since Medicare covers the cost of the item, you shouldn't refuse the offer. You've been experiencing some knee discomfort recently and think a brace may provide some relief. So, you express interest in the offer. You're told all that's needed to process the claim is your Social Security Number (SSN) or Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI). Once Medicare has that information, the caller says the item will be shipped.

If you accept the caller's offer and provide the requested information, the criminal obtains a fraudulent order for the brace from a practitioner who receives a monetary kickback. The order "certifies" that the brace is medically necessary for you to use in your home. Once the order is written, the criminal files a fraudulent claim with Medicare and receives payment. Though you will not receive the brace, you may be responsible for 20% of the cost billed to Medicare.

In addition to fraudulently billing Medicare for DME, criminals may use the information you provided to receive medical care for themselves. If this occurs, a record of erroneous health information is created about you. As a result, you may be denied Medicare services or equipment you legitimately need in the future because your records show that you already received them. In fact, the services or equipment actually went to someone posing as you.

Some criminals try to exert pressure on their victims by claiming that Medicare will soon run out of funds. Victims are told they should get the devices now while the funding is still available so they'll have them on hand when they're needed. If you receive such an offer, it's a scam. A legitimate DME provider will not bill Medicare for equipment that is not currently needed but may be needed some time in the future.

How to protect yourself

- Do not order or accept delivery of DME unless you're advised to do so by your health care provider.
- Do not give your SSN or MBI to anyone except trusted health care providers. Ask your providers to scan your driver's license and include it in your medical record. If a fraudster should present an altered driver's license with their picture and your name and personal information in an attempt to receive medical services, a provider would have reason to question the individual's identity.
- Legitimate Medicare representatives do not make unsolicited telephone calls offering free DME in exchange for a beneficiary's personal information. If you receive such a call, hang up the phone. You're dealing with a scammer.
- DME should be ordered only from Medicare-approved suppliers that offer the following services: home delivery, equipment set-up, proper personalized training in the use of the equipment, and a secure, encrypted website that you can easily navigate. It is advisable to check a DME supplier's ratings and reviews with your local Better Business Bureau (bbb.org) before placing an order.
- Review your Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) each quarter. Verify the accuracy of all charges for supplies and services submitted to the agency on your behalf. Report discrepancies to the following: Medicare (800-633-4227), HHS Office of Inspector General (800-447-8477), Illinois Attorney General's Senior Fraud Helpline (800-243-5377), and your local police department.

[Sources: SMP, AARP]