Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness February 17, 2000

Let it SHINE

While I was working on the most recent Byline, I kept finding references to a program called SHINE. As I learned more about the volunteer SHINE program, I couldn't help thinking of the song line, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!" This week's Byline tells about the program. It serves the dual purpose of recommending it to seniors who need assistance in dealing with medical questions and offering it to retirees who may be looking for a volunteer opportunity.

First, for the name behind the acronym. Serving Health Information Needs of Elders. The program is a service of the governor's Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

Now for an explanation of SHINE. Statewide there are 400 trained volunteers who staff call-in hot lines or fill scheduled drop-in sessions at councils on again. The counselors are trained in the intricacies of modern medical needs of an aging population. As people deal with the three M's of Medicare, Medigap, and Medicaid, they can be overcome by various rules and requirements of the bureaucracy. SHINE counselors can help.

A recent newsletter from the program wrote of the accomplishments of these volunteers. They claim to have saved their clients more than $11 million. The savings come from general distribution of medical information as well as one-on-one counseling sessions. A substantial portion of that savings comes from facilitating enrollment in the state's Senior Pharmacy program discussed in the last byline.

Availability of a refund of Medicare Part B premium is another money saver. Did you know that Massachusetts has a buy-in program that will pay the $45 monthly premium for low income Medicare recipients?

The termination of most Medicare HMOs in our region has created a flurry of business for SHINE. Anyone whose Medicare program was terminated may be suddenly forced to choose among the multiplicity of Medigap policies, and a person whose health needs have changed may need advice about choosing a new level of coverage. Medical insurance can be confusing for all of us, and is only more so when the federal government is in charge. The Medigap open enrollment period covers the months of February and March, so it is a busy time for volunteers.

Now that I have written about the service provided by SHINE here is some information for anyone who would like to participate as a volunteer. If you can make a two-year commitment to the program, volunteering 6-8 hours a week, SHINE is looking for you. Information is available from the Springfield office about he upcoming spring training sessions.

Whether you see yourself as a provider of services or a client, call the Springfield office at 827-7649 for information. Or call the Council on Aging, 565-4150, to find out when the next SHINE visit is scheduled. To quote from another old song, "Open up your heart and let the light SHINE in."

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