

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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SHINE Forum Coming to Longmeadow

Prescription costs! Medicare regulations! Medigap! If dealing with any of these issues is causing you to lose sleep, I have an offer of help for you. It comes in the shape of SHINE, with a visit to Longmeadow from SHINE Regional Director Gail Noe.

I have written about the SHINE program before, and I have written about the state's pharmacy assistance and other health programs. The SHINE acronym stands for Serving Health Information Needs of Elders. The program provides trained volunteers to counsel anyone who needs advice on accessing services. Director Noe is a good resource for the information that goes into the Byline. After our most recent consultation she offered to spend some time at our Greenwood Center talking directly to the seniors who are interested in learning about state health services.

Medicare questions will probably be limited to information about initial signup. Medical care has changed drastically in the past generation. Health problems that we used to accept as the price of growing older, from aching joints to high blood pressure, are now often treated with new joints and replacement blood vessels. Although such treatments were not anticipated at Medicare's inception, they come under the entitlement to medical care.

Medigap questions will deal with the costs and benefits of insurance programs to "fill the gap," policies that augment basic medical and hospital coverage.

The majority of questions asked by older constituents concern prescription drug coverage, and those questions will probably take most of Director Noe's time. I wrote earlier about new medical procedures that make our lives more comfortable. Advances in the pharmaceutical arena have also added to the quality of life of everyone, but especially for the senior population. The right prescription can ease pain, alleviate cardiac symptoms and add years to our lives, but these medical miracles often come at a high cost. Although Medicare has kept pace with rising costs, it does not cover prescription drugs.

Massachusetts now offers several forms of drug assistance. Some are subsidized by drug companies, some by the state. Some are limited to veterans and others are true insurance offers. Prescription Advantage is the newest and most comprehensive program. The complexities of three levels of payments, differences between local and mail-in costs, and other variations mean that the explanatory forum can be quite helpful.

Whether you are in search of the most comprehensive coverage or just looking for advice about the most economical method of buying medicine, I hope you will stop in at Greenwood at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, September 14, to talk with Gail Noe. If the date is not convenient, however, the program is offered at the East Longmeadow Senior Center on Thursday, September 6, at 1:00 p.m. If you cannot attend either event, general information is always available to you from the state's hotline, 1-800-AGE-INFO.