

Suggested Projects: Presidential Innovation Fellows
18 - The Medicare Show - PBS: Citizen Questions and Feedback

It would be a game-changing shift in government-citizen relations for Innovation Fellows to work with HHS and PBS to create a weekly Medicare Show experiment (e.g., 10 AM on Tuesdays in selected areas) for expert interviews and call-in questions. This experiment can gauge how much the Medicare population understands the program, and how well the flood of paper and numbers that Medicare regularly mails to 47,000,000 (yes, 47 million!) beneficiaries communicate and meet their needs.

The PBS show can be structured as an experiment in several areas with large retired populations. Good preparation work can identify important topics. For example: 1.) Retirees with limited incomes have a tough challenge to make rational Medicare drug benefit choices and calculations; 2.) An expert panel needs a representative of a Medicare Rights organization on every show: hospitals can pressure patients when they take longer time to recover and reach the limits of DRG reimbursement, but the DRG numbers are irrelevant; 3.) There is a lot of misinformation in the system and even when claims are denied in an initial review the laws are actually written and interpreted broadly by the courts and most denied claims eventually are granted if an appeal is filed. . . . Medicare spent \$524 billion in fiscal 2010 and as the elderly get drawn in, and must depend upon it, it *can* be complicated.

I wrote the first plan for a National Health Channel and online archive (including a Medicare Show) for the RWJ and Kaiser Family Foundations (in 2001). Dr. Susan Dentzer (then the health correspondent for PBS) led the discussions within PBS. It's a doable project, and we will learn a lot about unmet information needs.

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