

Five Tips to De-Stress the Entree into Medicare

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Your clients have one last thing to check off on their retirement checklist: Medicare enrollment. Here is how they can de-stress the process.

They've kicked the can with this one item because they're hearing from their friends and colleagues how horrible the process of "transitioning" to Medicare is.

Ignore.

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It needs to happen and we can show you how it can be stress-free. Stop ignoring.

There are two basic ways that you'll be approaching and transitioning into the Medicare system: you'll either enroll into Medicare at age 65 or after age 65. That sure doesn't sound too hard. Let's begin here.



1. Don't enroll in Medicare at age 65 unless you need or want to

When you turn 65-years old in the U.S., under most conditions you are eligible for Medicare. What is Medicare? It's health insurance. It happens to be provided by the U.S. government and you pay the government for your insurance coverage (Part B) if choose to get it. It confuses people because it is government-sponsored and it can surely frustrate many of us.

You have to know the proper hoops to jump through if you want to enroll into Medicare at age 65.

If you happen to be drawing your Social Security benefits prior to age 65, you will be automatically enrolled into Medicare Parts A and B.

Because you are automatically enrolled, does that mean you have to start paying the government for its insurance? What if you have your own and you're working? You're thinking properly, "No, they aren't going to make me take their insurance, right?" No, they're not.

There are many situations where you'll need or want to take that Part B medical coverage from Uncle Sam and begin paying for it. Maybe you're enrolled in an ACA plan as you turn 65. You'll want to get Parts A and B. Maybe your current plan unenrolls you at age 65; you'll want to get Parts A and B.

Perhaps you're working and your employer has more than 20 employees and you like your current employer insurance. You do not need to enroll into Parts A and B.

There are far too many scenarios to list here. But my general rule is:

Know WHY you are enrolling into Part A and Part B.

Don't be what I call a "just because" person. These are the folks that when I ask why they enrolled into Part B two years ago their answer is, "I don't know, my neighbor said that I had to".

Knowing why you are or are not enrolling into Medicare is one of the keys in understanding what you're doing.

2. Don't kill yourself with web searches and webinars

Remember that we're talking about de-stressing this process. For good information, a great place to start is with the Medicare and You Handbook from the government. Surprisingly, its 124 pages are full of good information. Most Medicare answers are within. It's a boring read, but it's full of good content.

Be careful attending webinars and workshops, especially ones that are provided by insurance carriers. If you attend the ABC insurance carrier's session at 7pm, do you truly believe they'll tell you about carrier XYZ's product? It's like getting sucked into a time-share seminar in Mexico. You almost walk out with the goods they intended. Not a good way to shop for your Medicare product.

Medicare is tough. So many mailers, ads on TV, robocalls and outsider opinions. Tune out some of it or you'll make yourself mad. I'm not saying don't learn; just don't attend 20 seminars. Medicare is not this hard.

3. Understand the two paths

You've arrived at finally needing Medicare. You're 68-years old, leaving your employer plan, you got your Part A with Medicare activated the month you turned 65 and you've been eagerly awaiting your arrival into Medicare and it's finally here.

What to do next?

Call your Medicare agent two to three months prior to your retirement and say, "Hey, I'm ready now; help me get there."

At that point, a good Medicare agent will walk you through the next steps. "Great Bob, let me help you get your Part B activated with the government. There are a few steps to take and we'll show you what to do."

Decide when you want your post-retirement insurance coverage to begin and plan around that start date.

During this time, you'll be talking with your "good insurance agent" about how much your Medicare will cost, what product you might need to pair with or replace your original Medicare.

That's what I and others at my firm do all day/every day. Those are our conversations.

Every discussion includes the **Medigap** versus **Medicare Advantage** decision. If there's one key to Medicare, it's understanding these two products and figuring out which one is best for your lifestyle, budget and more.

And, while you're discussing those products with your agent, refer back to that Medicare and Your Handbook and see **pages six and seven**. Those two pages spell out much of what you need to know – right there in black and white.

The problem is that most people either don't read the handbook or they gloss over it because there are 124 pages and it is difficult to discern what is most important.

Those two little pages are important – as in "seriously life impacting." Spend time talking with your agents about the two options.

4. Use technology

A positive from our COVID year has been the large uptick in my clients (all Medicare folks!) who are extremely open to technology.

I co-hosted a webinar recently with a credit union in Michigan and had over 500 registrants. Don't tell me that technology is a hindrance.

Carriers, in addition to consumers, have been expanding their tech services greatly over the past year as well. We were a virtual agency well before COVID-19 came along, so we were thrilled with the open arms attitude regarding using technology smartly. We rely on tech to keep our clients informed, sign documents and more. Many have commented that they feel that we are "hand-holding them," albeit electronically.

It can work. It does work. Yes, even with "seniors" (by the way, don't call them seniors). Take advantage of all that is now far easier to access from the comfort of your own home.

5. Secure a good Medicare guide

"Interview" your Medicare guide/agent before you choose one. Call different agencies and agents. Call them before you are 65 and ask them, "What should I do? Here's my story." Call several of them. See how they treat you after that call. Are they bugging you for the sale? Are they there when you need a question answered?

Do you have to go through an “exchange” to buy your Medicare product because your employer has mandated that relationship? I’m sorry is all I can say. My own father’s HRA (health reimbursement account) is held hostage each year because of this. He must work through a ginormous insurance exchange annually or he won’t get his \$4,000. He complains about every angle in dealing with them, but he’s stuck.

Ask your Medicare guide: what else do they sell? Do they sell annuities? Long-term care? Are they going to hit you up with that after Medicare? There are plenty of Medicare-only agents in the U.S. I, of course, happen to advocate for specialization. Just because a person “can offer” Medicare products, it doesn’t mean they’re the best agent for you.

Follow-up. This is key. Ask your Medicare guide/agent what the follow-up experience with you is going to look like: Will I hear from you again? Will you help me with my drug plan each year? Check Google reviews.

When my agency gets calls, I can immediately tell who are the orphaned people. Find an agent who won’t orphan you. Medicare requires follow up each year on your end. You owe it to yourself to find a guide who will feed you what that follow up should be and communicate to you as the year progresses. Find an agent who will provide you with the resources that you need for your Medicare years.

It’s possible.

At the end of those steps, you should be able to look back over your past few months and tell your neighbor, “Ahhhh, that wasn’t so bad.”

Approach Medicare in a logical manner. Understand that there are rules to be followed and timelines to meet. Find a good guide who knows the process and you’ll be good to go into retirement.

Checked that off your list, finally. Congrats.

Joanne Giardini-Russell is a Medicare nerd with [Giardini Medicare](#), which was created to help those approaching Medicare eligibility or those currently enrolled in Medicare better understand what they are purchasing and how their choices may affect their long-term outcomes regarding care, finances, etc.