

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Pharmacy Aid Program

The Byline usually covers a topic of general interest to all readers, but this week I am focusing on an issue for senior citizens or those who care for them. It is the Senior Pharmacy Program, new state plan. It does not apply to most of us but is so important to those elderly residents who need it that it deserved to be the focus of an entire column.

You may remember that the legislature enacted a law last summer to provide prescription assistance for low-income elderly. The months since then have been spent getting ready to initiate the program. The procedures are now in place and the paperwork is defined, so the program will begin in the spring. Here is the information you need to become eligible for assistance.

First, the requirements. Applicants must be over the age of 64 and have an annual income under \$10,300, 133 percent of the federal poverty level. They cannot be enrolled in Medicaid or receive prescription benefits through Medigap or a HMO.

Second, the application process. The enrollment period extends from February 1 to April 30. Greater Springfield Senior Services is the regional agency in charge. Applications are available at the agency. The Longmeadow Council on Aging, 565-4150, will have applications soon if it does not have them yet. Because it is the first year of the program, nobody knows how many people will seek to participate. Since funds for the program are limited and will be allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis, I recommend early application to ensure your inclusion.

One of the components of modern medical advances is the development of new drug therapies. A side effect of those drugs is the high price of prescriptions. The pharmacy access program provides up to \$500 per year to help meet those costs at minimal expense to participants. Those expenses are a \$15 enrollment fee and a co-payment of \$3 per generic and \$10 for brand name prescription.

In the weeks ahead a variety of social service providers will be searching for people who are in need of the new medical safety net. SHINE volunteers, home health care providers, council on aging personnel - all will be assisting with the enrollment procedures. I offer this cautionary note to applicants. The system has been in the developmental stage since August, and it should be ready for action. Nevertheless, it is the first month of operation. Please be patient with the delays that are part and parcel of any new system.

There has been much talk in the media about the shortage of medical care for those in need. The legislature enacted the pharmacy program in the hope that it will begin to address that shortage. As the implementation progresses and as you learn about the ways in which it works or does not work, I hope you will let me know.