

# Record-Journal

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## Surprise! Medicare also has *satisfied* customers

By Robert Pear  
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TULSA, Okla. — When Virginia G. Shores went to a pharmacy here to pick up five prescriptions, she thought she heard the pharmacist say she owed \$250, but she was wrong. The cost, with her new Medicare prescription drug card, was just \$50.

"I was flabbergasted," said Shores, whose kitchen counter looks like a medicine chest, full of pills for high blood pressure, heart failure, arthritis, nerve pain and lung disease.

Shores, 80, had been buying medicines from a mail-order pharmacy in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but now uses Medicare instead. "I was amazed at the amount of money it saved," Shores said.

She is one of Medicare's satisfied customers. They are not vocal, they are not organized, but they say it was worth wading through the hassles, confusion and complexity of the new program to enroll.

Treasury Department figures show that Medicare spent a total of \$5.1 billion on prescription drug benefits in January and February, the first months of the new program, which is expected to cost more than \$675 billion over 10 years.

One way to assess the program is to talk to people in a

place like Tulsa. People here are far removed from the raucous debate in Washington, where Republicans describe the drug benefit as a boon to older Americans and many Democrats call it a disaster.

In Oklahoma, Medicare beneficiaries can choose from 43 prescription drug plans, with premiums ranging from \$10.07 to \$70.79 a month, different co-payments and very different lists of covered drugs.

Satisfied beneficiaries say they could never have analyzed the options or made a choice without the help of friends and relatives, pharmacists or counselors from groups like LIFE Senior Services, a private non-profit group which offers advice at seminars and enrollment clinics in the Tulsa area.

The counselors are adept at using the Medicare Web site to compare drug plans and identify the ones with the lowest overall annual cost for a particular beneficiary.

The satisfaction of some beneficiaries stands in contrast to the frustration of many others, who were overcharged or unable to get essential medicines in the first chaotic weeks of the program.

"People who are satisfied are the quieter voices," said Leslie A. Dick, executive director of the Burgundy Place retirement community in Tulsa.