



Texas Doctors Opting Out of Medicare at Alarming Rate

Written On May 24, 2010 By Bob Kraft

“Texas doctors are opting out of Medicare at alarming rates, frustrated by reimbursement cuts they say make participation in government-funded care of seniors unaffordable.” That’s the lead of an article in the Houston Chronicle a few days ago. This is a real problem not only for Texas senior citizens, but also for younger people on Social Security disability who receive Medicare benefits. We hear about this frequently from our Social Security disability clients after they have won their cases and have begun receiving benefits. Here are excerpt from the article:

Two years after a survey found nearly half of Texas doctors weren’t taking some new Medicare patients, new data shows 100 to 200 a year are now ending all involvement with the program. Before 2007, the number of doctors opting out averaged less than a handful a year.

“This new data shows the Medicare system is beginning to implode,” said Dr. Susan Bailey, president of the Texas Medical Association. “If Congress doesn’t fix Medicare soon, there’ll be more and more doctors dropping out and Congress’ promise to provide medical care to seniors will be broken.”

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More than 300 doctors have dropped the program in the last two years, including 50 in the first three months of 2010, according to data compiled by the Houston Chronicle. Texas Medical Association officials, who conducted the 2008 survey, said the numbers far exceeded their assumptions.

The largest number of doctors opting out comes from primary care, a field already short of practitioners nationally and especially in Texas. Psychiatrists also make up a large share of the pie, causing one Texas leader to say, "God forbid that a senior has dementia."

The opt-outs follow years of declining Medicare reimbursement that culminated in a looming 21 percent cut in 2010. Congress has voted three times to postpone the cut, which was originally to take effect Jan. 1. It is now set to take effect June 1.