

Cherokee Regional Medical Center
300 Sioux Valley Drive
Cherokee, Iowa 51012

PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT:

Kent Lundquist
(712)225-3368 ext. 259
klundquist@cherokeermc.org

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CMRC Volunteer Receives Governor's Volunteer Award

Cherokee Regional Medical Center SHIP volunteer counselor Mike Otto recently received the Governor's Volunteer Award. The award was presented to him by Iowa Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds during a ceremony held on Buena Vista College Campus in Storm Lake. Otto was nominated for the award by his colleagues at the Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIP) in Des Moines after completing five years of service as a volunteer counselor for the organization. Recent recognition from other organizations serving seniors has come as well. Otto received small gifts recognizing five years of service from Northwest Aging Association (NAA) in Spencer for his service there as an Elder Guide and from the Iowa Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) for his service with that organization.

SHIP volunteer counselors serve seniors by providing information and assistance in all phases of Medicare, including Part A (Hospitals), B (Doctors and Out Patients), C (Medicare Advantage Programs) and D (Prescription Drug Plans.) NAA Elder Guides assist seniors in filling out Medicaid forms and in collecting the necessary documents needed before the application can be approved by the Department of Human Resources. They also assist seniors with other programs as directed by NAA. SMP volunteers assist in keeping seniors informed about possible financial and Medicare scams and in reporting any fraud, scams or other abuse observed to local and statewide SMP officials.

Two of the above organizations have recently received national recognition. The Iowa SMP recently was recognized by the U.S. Administration on Aging at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. for being a top five project in numbers of Medicare beneficiaries educated and served in 2010. Iowa was third in the nation educating or serving 25,204 seniors. Each SMP volunteer received a special Certificate of Appreciation for assisting SMP earn this national recognition.

Iowa SHIP was also honored. Director Kris Gross said in a recent e-mail to volunteer counselors that the Centers for Medicare Services (CMS) has noted a sharp increase in the Iowa performance

measures they use to evaluate the work done by the various statewide SHIIP organizations. The first year the measures were used Iowa SHIIP ranked 24. Last year we moved up to 15 and this year Iowa SHIIP is among the top 10 states at ninth. Gross thanked her volunteer counselors for “all you’re doing to serve Iowans.”

“It’s been a real eye-opener to me,” Otto says. “I never realized how many seniors are living on so little until I began meeting with them one-on-one. It’s especially apparent for those applying for Medicaid assistance. You do everything you can to make sure they turn in an acceptable application. If the information is incorrect or incomplete, it just delays acceptance.”

Most of the people that Otto assists have income and resources well above Medicaid-eligible limits. “I’m usually working with people to clear up Medicare questions. These usually involve people new to Medicare who have questions about the coverage Medicare Parts A and B provide and explaining why they need a Medicare Supplement and a Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan.” Sometimes people have billing questions but for the most part CMS does a good job in paying the correct amounts on bills. People are always amazed though when they see CMS paying doctors more than they billed. “That’s always hard to explain,” Otto said. “It happens when the national average cost for a certain procedure is more than what local providers charge. CMS pays the national average, not the local rate.”

The predominate part of his SHIIP work though deals with Medicare Part D prescription drug plans. “Each year participants should do a comparison of drug plans during the annual enrollment period for the upcoming year,” Otto said. “Plans change, premiums change, drug formularies change annually. You need to do a comparison each year to make sure you have the best plan for you in the upcoming year. By best plan I mean a plan that covers your drugs at the least cost possible.”

Those needing assistance should call Cherokee Regional Medical Center at 712-225-3368, Ext. 148 and ask to schedule a SHIIP appointment. Computer-savvy people can do the comparisons themselves on their home computer by going to www.Medicare.gov and clicking on the “Compare Drug and Health Plans” link.

This year’s Annual Enrollment Period comes earlier than in the past. It begins October 15 and ends December 7. “The new drug plans will be on the Medicare.gov website beginning October 1 but you won’t be able to enroll in a 2012 plan until October 15,” Otto said.

Please see attached photo and cutline below



Cherokee Regional Medical Center SHIP volunteer Mike Otto receives the Governor's Volunteer Award from Iowa Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds at a recent ceremony held in Storm Lake.