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“Alternative Benefits” News

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Quick quiz

Each month I'll give you a new question.

Just reply to this email for the answer.

Who was the cha-cha champion of Hong Kong in 1958?

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Open Enrollment – for Individual ACA Coverage (under 65)

Like last year, you will have only 45 days to make changes to your Affordable Healthcare Act (ACA) plan for 2021. Open enrollment, the time the ACA law allows you to change plans or enroll in a new plan, begins November 1, 2020 and ends December 15, 2020. The good news is that based on preliminary information, rates on the three available plans on the Marketplace (Anthem, Harvard Pilgrim & Ambetter) are expected to be about 20% lower "on average" in 2021. Most of our clients will receive a letter from us by mail around mid-October with more info about the enrollment and renewal process for 2021. If you expect to need assistance with your renewal or have any questions, contact us.

As in past years, if you do not have any changes to demographics, family members enrolled, expected income for 2021 if you get subsidies, and you like the plan that you are on, you may not need to do anything and automatically renew*.

On the other hand, if you expect to need to make changes to your application for 2021, you can contact us anytime now to get the process started. To better serve your needs and accommodate your schedule, we will be working extended hours starting November 1st, including phone appointments on request, seven days a week including nights and weekends.

*its suggested to actively update your renewal at least every 2 or 3 of years, which can be done quicker through our more streamlined alternative to Healthcare.gov (www.ABSHealthPlans.com, click on 'Health Insurance' starting November 1st)

Your Referrals are Appreciated

If you have family, friends or business associates that could use help finding and enrolling in an affordable Health plan to best meet their medical needs and budget, have them contact us. And, have them mention your name and email address so that we can personally express our appreciation. Your referrals are greatly appreciated!

The ABC & D'S of Medicare & Alternatives

If you are on Medicare or plan to be soon, there are a few things you need to know to better understand your Medicare coverage

Medicare Part A: Remember, for most people, Medicare Part A is automatic. The government will automatically enroll you when you turn 65.

Part A (Hospital Insurance) helps cover:

- Inpatient care in hospitals
- Skilled nursing facility care
- Hospice care
- Home health care

Medicare Part B: Most people enroll in Medicare Part B, unless you continue to be covered under an employer health plan.

Part B (Medical Insurance) helps cover:

- Services from doctors and other health care providers
- Outpatient care
- Home health care
- Durable medical equipment (like wheelchairs, walkers, hospital beds, and other equipment and supplies).
- Many preventive services)like screenings, shots, and yearly wellness visits.

Part B requires a monthly premium usually deducted from your monthly Social Security benefit. It's quickest to apply online, but you may also apply by phone or even in person at your local social security administration office (if available in your area).

While this all sounds great, I do have a warning for you. At first glance, Medicare benefits may appear comprehensive — providing everything you need to cover and control healthcare costs during this season of life. However, there are gaps in coverage, including deductibles, copays, coinsurance, etc. that you need to be aware of. Failing to cover these gaps could put you and your family in a dangerous financial situation.

Part C (Medicare Advantage Plans), take over or replace Medicare Parts A&B whereas Medigap plans fill the gap after Medicare (see below for comparison of these plan options).

Medicare Supplements (Medigap) Plans vs Part C (Advantage Plans): To deal with gaps in Medicare coverage, most Medicare Beneficiaries in NH have a Medicare Supplement (Medigap) plan. This is for several reasons, including that these plans provide the more complete coverage in filling the Medicare gap in coverage whereas **Advantage plans**, although marketed heavily, and sometimes including some limited dental & vision benefits, are more pay-as-you-go type of plans (with out of pocket maximums averaging from about \$5000 to \$7000 annually depending on the plan). According to our information, only about 1 in 6 Medicare Beneficiaries in NH had an Advantage plan, as of May 2020. Medigap

plans allow access to 'any provider' in the U S that accepts Medicare whereas Advantage plans are usually subject to a network and more limited access (and referrals in many cases). Whereas Advantage plans can work for people that are in good health, it may be difficult in the future to switch to a Medigap plan when one has more pre-existing health issues. That's because Medigap plans, in NH, may then be subject to medical underwriting, resulting in possible denial or higher rates. There are, however, other considerations so for more info on the pros and cons, contact your agent and we can answer your questions and/or send you more info to compare these options.

Medicare Part D: Medicare Part D is Medicare's prescription drug coverage and is an optional benefit offered to everyone who has Medicare. However, there is a long-term penalty that may apply for any eligible beneficiary who does not have Part D coverage, or other creditable coverage. It's important to compare drug coverage options with any current prescription plan you may have.

All of this can be very confusing, and can have long term consequences, so don't hesitate to contact us to address any questions related to these gaps and options. A better understanding of all of this can help you to achieve true peace of mind so that high healthcare costs will not be a part of your golden years.

Let's Connect



Cheesy Cauliflower Broccoli Soup

Fall has arrived, so here's an easy recipe for a deliciously comforting soup for when the weather starts to cool down.

Serves 4

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 2 large carrots, julienned
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose or gluten-free flour
- 3 1/2 cups vegetarian or chicken broth
- 1/2 cup half and half or whole milk
- 3 cups cauliflower florets, finely chopped
- 3-4 cups broccoli florets, finely chopped



- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

In a large pot, melt butter over medium-high heat. Add garlic, onion and carrots. Sauté until vegetables are tender, about 5 minutes.

Stir in flour to coat vegetables, then slowly stir in broth. Add milk, cauliflower, broccoli, salt, pepper and garlic powder. Bring it to a simmer. Cook until broccoli and cauliflower are tender, 10-15 minutes. Stir in cheese and reduce heat to low.

Pour 3 cups of soup into blender and carefully blend until smooth. Return blended soup to pot and stir to combine.

Serve with extra shredded cheddar on top, if desired.

Experts Predict Severe Flu Season, Strongly Recommend Flu Shots

Each year, the doctors at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) look ahead to forecast the severity of the looming flu season. This year, however, the CDC has not provided an update pending COVID-19 progression. The World Health Organization (WHO), in late February every year, however, recommends the level of flu vaccine for the United States and the Northern Hemisphere as it takes about six months to produce enough vaccine for the season.

One manufacturer announced it would increase its flu vaccine production by eight percent for the U.S. and the Northern Hemisphere.

Of diseases for which we currently have vaccines, the flu causes the most deaths. Flu season begins in October but can continue as late as March. It is important that Americans avoid the flu as much as possible, according to many doctors. With coronavirus infections still peaking in many states, it's best to avoid emergency room visits and hospitalizations whenever possible.

During the 2019-2020 flu season, the CDC reported 39 million flu incidents and 24,000 flu deaths. We cannot afford to ignore flu vaccines this year. Last year, almost 50 percent of the U.S. population received a flu vaccine. The national goal was 70 percent.

Where Can I Get My Flu Shot?

Because flu strains differ from year to year, manufacturers update flu vaccines each year to best protect the public. Flu vaccines should become available at your doctor's office or local pharmacy by early October. However, many medical providers will book your flu vaccine appointment early. If you are elderly, have a preexisting medical condition, or are concerned about how the 2020 flu strain will impact you, call your doctor to see if you can book your flu shot now, before supplies arrive or run low.

Why is Dental & Vision coverage so Important for Seniors... (and everyone)

We're always hearing that 75 is the new 65, 65 is the new 55... etc. everybody's 10 years younger these days than what they used to feel at that age. And while seniors can be proactive in many ways to improve their physical health, some impairments like dental and vision tend to still progress with age. So, its important for us to offer options for seniors that will need such coverage, including Individual Dental plans starting as low as \$33 monthly and Vision benefits from VSP starting at about \$15 monthly. However, be sure to plan ahead, as there is generally a waiting period (as much as six months) for coverage on dental work other than Preventive (unless you have prior continuous coverage). Free quotes are available on request.

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Tackle Money Matters as a Team with These Tips

As married couples move into their prime earning and spending years together, they may find shared finances a challenging and sometimes uncomfortable subject to broach. But top financial advisers recommend tackling money matters as a well-oiled team as an exercise in full disclosure, trust and financial security. Here's how proactive pairs pull it off.

Fair is a feeling, not a fact. A fair way of handling the monthly bills is not necessarily a 50/50 split. As long as both parties are comfortable, then a proportional split based on income is the right way to go. You could also factor in unpaid work like childcare duties or housework.

Debt discussions. While you are not legally responsible for your significant other's debt, it'll go a long way in reaching your shared financial goals if you tackle it together. This doesn't always mean taking it on yourself, but you could address how much each person contributes to shared expenses, based on debt repayments.

Money talks. Couples who check in regularly are able to review bills, budget and make progress on debts and goals. Why not set aside an hour each month for a standing meeting to get a handle on what has worked and what hasn't? You could also add a positive incentive by ordering pizza afterwards.

Plan ahead. Planning for doomsday scenarios may not sound like fun, but it is important to support each other during end-of-life arrangements. On the brighter side, you should plan how you would spend a windfall like an inheritance, bonus or property sale. A good rule of thumb is 70 percent on savings, 20 percent on debts and 10 percent on lifestyle upgrades.



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