

EMMANUEL CHRISTIAN HEALTH CENTER, P.A.

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The mission of our practice, the Emmanuel Christian Health Center, is to glorify God by providing excellence in health care. The vision of our practice is to meet the needs of the people in every location to which God sends us.

Over the years this vision has included providing flu shots for our entire community when other providers stopped giving flu shots due to a shortage of flu vaccine and low reimbursement. It also included providing primary care for a large population of Haitian immigrants (in our Orlando office) who had little knowledge of how to navigate the American medical system. Recently our vision has been refocused to providing continuous high quality health care for Medicare beneficiaries at a time when other providers are withdrawing themselves from the Medicare program.

Doctors rejecting the traditional Medicare program and its beneficiaries is a growing trend nationwide, and is already occurring on a large scale here in The Villages, Florida . The usual reason given is that Medicare reimbursement rates have not risen to keep pace with medical practice costs (this is true). Another factor is that Medicare will soon change to a payment system called MACRA that will penalize doctors who do not give evidence of what Medicare defines as quality care (determined by a doctor's ability to supply an abundance of computer generated data about our patients in order to meet Medicare guidelines). Rather than submit to increasing administrative burdens with lagging reimbursements, many doctors are just calling it quits with the traditional Medicare system.

Despite these factors our practice has made a commitment to continue to accept traditional Medicare. I enrolled in Medicare years ago at a time when it was the only insurance available for retirees like my own parents who worked long hard years looking forward to their Medicare benefits. I admit that it has been challenging to run a financially sound practice and accept traditional Medicare. On the other hand, the model which God has used to train me for providing health care was working effectively long before Medicare existed. It is found in the Bible where Jesus took seemingly limited resources (2 fish and 5 loaves of bread), thanked God for what He had, and was empowered by God to feed over 5000 men plus the women and children who were with them. And they had leftovers. With God all things are possible.

One thing that God has taught me through the miracle of Jesus feeding the multitude is that the behavior of the people receiving the miracle played an important part in its success. Jesus gave specific instructions to put the people in order (in position) to receive. They followed His instructions and that created an ordered system which allowed the feeding miracle to flow. In that same Spirit, I am writing this letter to my patients and other Medicare beneficiaries to suggest simple instructions you can follow to help your doctors not only survive but thrive in the traditional Medicare program as we provide excellent care for you against seemingly impossible odds.

#1 If you take flu shots and pneumonia shots, take them from your doctor or a doctor who provides shots, not a grocery store, drug store, etc. Although it may be more convenient for you to get a shot elsewhere, taking that same shot from your doctor helps the doctor keep track of what vaccines you have had and which vaccines you may need in the future. It also gives the doctor an added source of income.

#2 Organize and write down your needs before you come for your appointment. Some doctors prefer not to treat Medicare patients because as a group Medicare patients take longer to see in a visit than younger patients who have fewer ailments and better paying commercial insurance. To help your visit be as efficient as possible, know what you are coming for before you leave home and write it down. Your list should include all health questions you want to discuss and all refills you will need in the near future.

#3 If you are able to perform a task for yourself then please do so rather than ask your doctor's staff to do it. If you can call to get authorization for your insurance to pay for your medicine that saves your doctor the time and overhead cost of doing this work for you. If you are able to set up your own appointments with the specialists we refer you to, then that helps the doctor's staff as well. By the same token, if you require us to assist you with a task please do not hesitate to ask. We are here to help you when needed.

#4 Learn your doctor's office policies and follow them. Health care works better when a practice and its patients work together as a team. But to be on the team you have to know the team rules (practice policies). Our practice has produced a brochure which summarizes all our major office policies that affect patient care. We encourage all new and established patients to obtain this brochure from our office and become familiar with practice policies.

#5 Do the best you can to follow your diet, take your medicine and improve your own health conditions. Medicare now defines quality of care as good numbers reported to them for things like blood pressure and diabetic hemoglobin A-1-C. As unbelievable as it may sound, your doctor may be penalized if you do not control your chronic health conditions. And ultimately you will be penalized if these added penalties force your doctor into the position of leaving the Medicare program.

#6 If you are computer literate, then please use the practice's online patient portal. It saves you and the practice time when you check in for your visit from home. You can fill in detailed information about why you are coming, explain questions you need the doctor to address, update your allergies and medication list, all before you ever reach the office. If you are not able to check in for your visit online, our office will gladly give you a paper check-in form to take home and bring completed to your next visit.

As a child I often heard my grandmother say, "if you waste you will struggle". A medical practice which wastes time, effort, money and human resources will definitely struggle under the current and future Medicare payment system. As a Medicare beneficiary the ideas in this letter are just some ways you can help your doctor avoid the struggle, and instead thrive (not just survive) as he/she provides you the care that you need.

Praying that God will bless you with good health,



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