



OFFICE OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850

AUG 31 2004

Mr. Rob Schneider
Consumers Union Southwest
1300 Guadalupe, Suite 100
Austin, Texas 78701-1643

Dear Mr. Schneider:

This is in response to your letter concerning the use of social security numbers (SSNs) on Medicare cards.

The Medicare card is issued to an individual when he/she becomes entitled to Part A and/or Part B of Medicare. The card includes a health insurance claim (HIC) number instead of a SSN. The HIC number is a variation of the SSN that is assigned by the Social Security Administration. In certain circumstances, the HIC number may be based on the individual's own SSN, but it may also be based on the SSN of a spouse or parent.

CMS works with the Social Security Administration, the DHHS Office of the Inspector General, the Department of Justice, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to continually monitor any misuse of Medicare benefits. This surveillance includes misuse of the Medicare HIC number. CMS is also working with the Federal Trade Commission to assist in the deterrence of identify theft.

We have advised our Medicare beneficiaries and expect them to take reasonable steps to safeguard their Medicare cards much in the same way they would protect a credit card.

Thank you for your interest in protecting Medicare beneficiaries from identity theft. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact Brenda Thew, of my staff, at 410-786-4889.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Brandt
Acting Director
Program Integrity Group

cc: Mike Pagels