

# Auditors say insurance companies misspend millions on Medicare

WASHINGTON (AP) — Health insurance companies have misspent millions of Medicare dollars, federal auditors have found, because of business inefficiencies and excess payments to doctors.

Previously undisclosed audits by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare questioned practices ranging from the purchase of 2,100 monogrammed golf balls to payment of \$230 million to Florida doctors without assurance that the fees were reasonable.

Spokesmen for the Social Security Administration and the insurance companies said many of the deficiencies disclosed by the audits have been remedied. Some insurers also challenge portions of the findings, objecting to the HEW auditors' statistical projections of misspending from an analysis of sample payments.

The claims of corrective action could not be verified. The audits run two years late, and the Social Security Administration won't open current files to newsmen.

## Air conditioning bad for patients, surgeon reports

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — A cold, air-conditioned recovery room may be among a hospital's worst enemies, says a surgeon who has observed the effects of heat on patients.

Dr. John A. Moncrief of Charleston, S.C., says most hospital recovery rooms are kept cool for the benefit of medical personnel.

"This is the worst thing in the world for patients," he said in an interview, noting that the time immediately following surgery is critical.

A patient fresh from surgery generally finds himself "thrown into a cool room," and his body at once begins burning up energy just to keep warm, he said. "The body temperature is dissipated very rapidly."

It could be vital to some patients, he said. "If his heart isn't able to pump well enough to distribute this energy, the patient can have cardiac problems very easily."

Moncrief, professor of surgery at the Medical University of South Carolina, says chilly hospital rooms also create problems for burn patients.

The former commander of the burn center here at Brooke Army Medical Center, Moncrief said the healing process in burn patients requires tremendous amounts of energy.

In other types of patients, the increase in energy demand may rise 50 per cent above normal for three or four days after surgery; in severe injuries such as a gunshot wound to the stomach, it may increase by 100 per cent, he said.

But in the case of a seriously burned patient, he added, this demand for energy may jump 200 per cent for six to eight weeks.

"If you put a burn patient in a cold environment, he will lose heat by radiation—he'll try to heat the room with his body just like a radiator heats a house," Moncrief said.

If the burn patient's environment is warm, he said, his body will need less body heat to keep warm and can use its energy "for the more important functions of healing wounds and combating infection."

Moncrief said this doesn't mean the entire hospital room has to be warm. The patient needs only a "microenvironment" around him, such as heat lamps that the Army burn center here has used since 1964, he said.

When the center first began using the heat lamps, Moncrief said, doctors noticed that a burn patient's temperature would drop three or four degrees when the lamps were turned off.

"When they turned the lamps back on, their temperatures floated back up," he said, so the lamps were kept on all the time until the patient healed sufficiently.

The ideal temperature, he said, would be just below the "sweating point," or about 93 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Ideally, we'd like to have an environment in which the body is not expending additional energy to warm it or cool it," he said.

Although the heat concept is common knowledge at the Army burn center—the armed forces' only burn treatment and study unit—it has not yet gained universal acceptance, Moncrief said. But he predicted it will eventually become part of standard practice.

panies, and two independent insurers acting as Medicare payment agents for doctor bills had this to say:

"Carrier performance under Medicare has in the majority of instances been erratic, inefficient, costly and inconsistent with congressional intent . . ."

Thomas M. Tierney, who runs the Medicare program for the government, had a different assessment.

"I think in the over-all, they

(carriers) and intermediaries have done an effective job in administering a very complex program," he said. "This is not to say there are not problems."

The insurance companies and "blue" plans funnel government money to health institutions and doctors who treat Medicare patients. They assume no risk, administrative expenses are paid in full and no profit is allowed.

The HEW audit findings, which will be aired this month at hear-

ings by the Senate antitrust and monopoly subcommittee, are serving as ammunition for proponents of government-run health insurance.

"The weaknesses demonstrated in the audits should disqualify business from any role in new health-care insuring arrangements," said Max Fine, executive director of the Committee for National Health Insurance.

President Nixon, among others, proposes to funnel billions of dol-

lars into the carriers and an expanded, government-required and subsidized health insurance.

The federal auditors' most common complaint involved overcharges—failure by companies to limit physicians' payments to "reasonable, customary and usual fees," as defined by doctors themselves.

"No one can say for certain how much money has been overpaid as a result of the failure to apply statutory limitations on 'reason-

able charges,'" the Senate Finance Committee staff report said. But it estimated the amount at "many hundreds of millions of dollars."

The Social Security Administration, under prodding from Congress, has recently removed some companies from the program or cut their Medicare business. Cleveland Blue Shield lost its contract. Thirteen counties in Southern California were taken away from California Blue Shield. Chi-

cago Blue Shield lost six counties.

The auditors also spotted expenses they said were charged improperly to Medicare.

They included those golf balls, country club and social memberships, liquor, and leased cars. Virginia Blue Cross. In addition, 21 of 74 Blue Cross plans have built new offices with government money. The government considers this expenditure legitimate.

SPRING \* SPECIALS



EXTRA SAVINGS!

THERMOS  
COOLER AND JUG  
COMBINATION

DELUXE 47 QT.  
COOLER PLUS  
1 GALLON JUG

\$15.99

TOUGH RUST PROOF  
SEAMLESS LEAK  
PROOF  
CHROME PLATED  
HARDWARE WITH  
BOTTLE OPENER!

GARDEN AND PATIO



VILLAGE BLACKSMITH  
**EDGER-TRIMMER**  
**\$15.88**

MODEL NO. 9400 CHANGES  
IN SECONDS EDGE TO TRIM!  
PUSH-BUTTON ON & OFF  
SWITCH SAFE 3 WIRE PLUG



STRUCTO  
**BAR B-Q- GRILL**  
**\$6.99**

THIRD LEG  
DETACHES & ALL  
LEGS FOLD UNDER!  
BIG 24" CHROME  
PLATED GRILL!



PICKET  
FENCE  
**39¢**

3 FT. SECTION!

GARDEN  
AND  
FLOWER  
SEEDS

25c & 35c  
PKG.

50%  
OFF

EXCEL TOP QUALITY  
EASY TO GROW!



KIT PASTE  
WAX/CLEANER

\$1.19

12 OZ. CAN PRE-SOFTENED  
WITH APPLICATOR!!

COCOA  
BRUSH  
DOOR MAT

\$1.69

100 PER CENT PURE  
COCOA FIBER REG. 1.89  
14" X 24"



GARBAGE CAN  
TOTE CART

\$6.44

HOLDS 2-20 GALLON  
PLASTIC OR METAL  
CANS

4-CUP  
CERAMIC  
BREWMASTER

\$1.29

COMPLETE WITH CORD  
ELECTRIC HOT  
POT-MAKES 4-  
CUPS COFFEE-TEA!

CHILDREN'S  
BIG 9"  
DIAMETER  
PLAY  
BALLS

69¢

BRIGHT COLORS &  
DESIGNS FOR YARD-  
POOL-BEACH



LOUNGE  
EXERCISER

\$19.95

NYLON WEBBING  
TUBULAR STEEL  
FRAME

SKAGGS  
MALDROXAL  
LIQUID

69¢

12 OZ. ANTACID  
SOOTHING NON-  
CONSTIPATING!



MENNEN  
SKIN BRACER

69¢

4 OZ. BOTTLE  
THE WAKE-UP  
AFTER SHAVE

FDS FEMININE  
HYGIENE  
DEODORANT

99¢

OUR REG. \$1.29  
3 OZ. AEROSOL SPRAY



FULL LENGTH  
DOOR MIRROR

\$3.88

GENUINE HARDWOOD  
WITH MOUNTING SCREWS  
EASY TO MOUNT



VAPORETTE  
INSECT  
STRIP

99¢

KILLS FLYING INSECTS UP TO 3 MONTHS!



PICNIC BASKET

\$3.33

WEAVE BASKET  
WITH CARRYING  
HANDLES & COVER!



SKAGGS  
ALBERTSONS  
DRUGS & FOODS

HOURS

MON. - SAT. 9:00am- 9:00 pm

SUNDAY 10:00 am - 7:00 pm



BASEBALL PITCHBACK

\$4.99

DURABLE NYLON  
& STEEL CON-  
STRUCTION  
OFFICIAL  
LITTLE LEAGUE  
BALL REBOUND  
DEVICE!  
MODEL  
NO. 07-1801

UNIVERSITY DR. AT COLLEGE AVE.