

Triangle Business Journal - February 22, 2010
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TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, February 19, 2010

Program may shut down businesses

Triangle Business Journal

In response to James Gallagher's Feb. 12, 2010 article "Gordian sues North Carolina over Medicaid payments", while it is true the importance of recent state and federal decisions about this subject cannot be denied, the complexities of the issues at hand are leading to misconceptions about the facts.

Several states around the U.S., including North Carolina, are part of a "phase one" rollout of a new restrictive Medicare bidding program to determine which providers of oxygen equipment, wheelchairs, walkers, and other home medical equipment will be allowed to service thousands of seniors and North Carolinians in need of home health care. This severely flawed, one-size-fits-all bidding program enacted in October 2009 is effectively shutting out local service providers, with over 500 small businesses in our state looking at closing their doors as a result.

This is such a contentious, serious issue that 140 members of the **U.S. House of Representatives** have signed on to new legislation, H.R. 3790, which has been drafted to stop this bidding program before it destroys thousands of small businesses and prevents patients from accessing local 24/7 service providers. Eight of the 13 members of the North Carolina congressional delegation, on both sides of the political fence, have leant their support to this bipartisan solution.

Although phrases like "bidding" "Medicare" and "Medicaid" are common in many of the recent news reports on home medical equipment issues, the specific topics of the articles – whether they be legal actions by out-of-state companies to access North Carolina Medicaid patients or the aforementioned restrictive Federal bidding regulations – are distinctly different.

Filing lawsuits to circumvent state Medicaid rules has nothing to do with a longtime, Triangle-based home medical equipment provider trying to avoid going out of business because they can't participate in a Medicare bidding process. Seniors and patients losing their access to chosen, reliable, local service providers have little in common with state officials choosing one supplier for diabetes products. Still, these distinctly different elements, all very serious, are often weaved together in the same news piece due to their relationship to the home medical equipment industry.

The fact of the matter is that one common element does in fact flow through all this media attention – the subject of patient access.

Political expediency and dollars and cents often cloud the vision of state and federal officials ensuring that seniors and patients in need can access quality service for their home medical equipment whenever they need it, regardless of the situation at hand. Providing fair competition between small, regional, and national home medical equipment providers located in North Carolina is time-tested and proven to avoid the high costs associated with emergency and institutional care while making sure that our friends and loved ones are taken care of with dignity and respect.

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