

North Carolina Association for Medical Equipment Services



Preserving access to quality care

PRESS RELEASE

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Medical Equipment Industry Turns Out for Bidding Seminar in Charlotte

State organization presents training, advocacy on restrictive Federal government regulations

(Charlotte, N.C.) North Carolina's leader in home medical equipment advocacy and education, NCAMES, recently hosted the fourth in a series of instructional seminars on understanding and working with complex new Federal regulations affecting hundreds of local businesses and thousands of patients across the state.

Approximately 70 attendees participated in "Smart Bidding for Smart Businesses" October 29 at the Hilton University Place in Charlotte to understand key dynamics of the Federal government's bidding program for Medicare-related durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies (DMEPOS). This type of equipment and services includes medical oxygen, wheelchairs, hospital beds, diabetic supplies, infusion therapy, inhalation drugs, and other medically required equipment, services and supplies.

"This seminar was important for our home medical equipment businesses in North Carolina to learn how to operate under a mandate coming from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in Washington, D.C.," Beth Bowen, NCAMES executive director, said, referring to rules put in place in 2008 creating a national bidding process for businesses wishing to provide Medicare Part B funded home medical equipment (HME).

Calling the DMEPOS bidding program "deeply flawed," Bowen said it puts long-time, respected North Carolina HME providers at a competitive disadvantage with unproven out-of-state vendors, many of whom have little or no experience in providing home medical equipment but can underbid more established providers.

"The Federal government's restrictive bidding program and its focus on lowest-price bids selectively contracts with very few HME vendors and can eliminate 90 percent of qualified providers from being able to care for their patients," she said, adding, "We're already seeing negative effects on small businesses, quality and levels of service due to continued reduction in payments, equipment innovation and patient choice."

Bill Griffin was one of the attendees of the October 29 seminar who was looking to learn about producing a good, clean bid, abiding by the new rules and regulations and not getting rejected during the bidding process. In addition to experiencing an intense, drill-down "how to" seminar, Griffin also got the opportunity to advocate for changes to the Federal regulations governing his industry.

"I've been in business for 26 years, built up a loyal clientele, gotten good at my craft," he said, adding, "Now all that's in jeopardy due to misguided government bureaucracy."

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According to Bowen, the first attempt at implementing the Federal bidding restrictions proved so confusing and disruptive to patient services that Congress passed the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) earlier this year, temporarily halting the process. MIPPA's delay expired in October, and the restrictive bidding process was restarted in nine metropolitan areas across the U.S., including Charlotte, without any public comment or addressing fundamental problems in the program. Bowen explained that new information – such as non-partisan independent studies from Robert Morris University and Drexel University – is emerging to support the drive to make sorely needed changes to the restrictive Federal DMEPOS bidding program.

"In addition to educating our member companies about the nuts and bolts of the restrictive bidding process, we're supporting a truly bi-partisan bill in Congress with 61 cosponsors to proactively correct flaws in this DMEPOS program," she said. So far, six of 13 members of the North Carolina congressional delegation have signed-on to support the bill, H.R. 3790, including Democrat Heath Shuler, an original cosponsor, and Charlotte-area Republican Sue Myrick, a breast cancer survivor who has successfully championed medical-oriented legislation.

Approximately eight million Americans require some type of medical care in the home. For more information on the home medical equipment services industry in North Carolina visit the NCAMES website at www.ncames.org.

ABOUT NCAMES

With close to 300 member companies and growing, the North Carolina Association for Medical Equipment Services (NCAMES) is the statewide leader in preserving access to safe, affordable, and therapeutic home medical equipment. We provide advocacy and education to home medical equipment (HME) providers statewide dedicated to helping North Carolina's growing senior population and patients of all ages gain more mobility and experience a high quality of life in the comfort and privacy of their own homes. NCAMES was instrumental in passing the nation's first HME licensure law which has been working to ensure quality home health care since 1995, and fully supports pending legislation H.R. 3790 to continue HME access for patients in need. For more information, visit www.ncames.org or call (919)-387-1221.

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