

Advocacy Organization Launches YouTube Channel to Fight Medicare Threats to Home Medical Equipment Patients

YouTube.com/SaveJobsNC Highlights Devastating Effects of Feds' Restrictive Medicare Bidding Program on Access to Quality Service

(Charlotte and Raleigh, N.C.) North Carolina's leader in home medical equipment advocacy and education, NCAMES, has launched a YouTube channel, [YouTube.com/SaveJobsNC](https://www.youtube.com/SaveJobsNC), to shine the spotlight on the devastating effects of Medicare's restrictive bidding program on providing quality service to home medical equipment (HME) patients. The program limits which local providers can service patients who use Medicare to pay for their oxygen systems, wheelchairs, and other life-sustaining medical supplies.

Three videos are featured, including an animated primer on the bidding issue; Congressional testimony from a registered nurse against Medicare's program; and a news report on a local HME business owner who has been forced into staffing cuts by the government.

"Many jobs are being lost and companies are closing," NCAMES Executive Director Beth Bowen said. "This bidding program is causing delayed hospital discharges because patients can't get their equipment and services, and patients are calling 9-1-1 because their new oxygen provider the government is forcing them to use is out-of-state and unlicensed.

"Medicare is threatening patient access to quality care and wasting taxpayer money doing it," she added.

Since going into effect January 1, 2011 in nine metropolitan areas throughout the country -- including Charlotte -- Medicare's bidding program is being featured more and more in media outlets in North Carolina and nationwide as complaints from patients and providers about its implementation continue to grow. A recent local television news report highlighted the aspect of government waste, focusing on the massive costs of wheelchair rentals billed through Medicare vs. purchasing one outright.

According to Bowen, the Federal government's approach to this problem is to drive down costs by eliminating competition through the bidding process and forcing the remaining HME providers into "suicide bidding" to provide products and services at unmanageable sub-industry prices.

"Our industry agrees waste must be eliminated, but focusing on artificially deflating the price of equipment without addressing how to protect the service aspect is dangerous to the patients who need that service, in many cases 24/7 access," Bowen said.

Bowen gave an example of a K4 wheelchair which usually requires some type of local rehab specialist to deal with the specific patient need for which the chair is required. One or several face-to-face visits with the patient prior to delivery are required to fit them properly and determine which accessories the

patient needs. The HME provider must maintain the liability to repair the chair during the 13 months of rental; if a patient purchases a wheelchair off the internet, the onus is on the patient or family member to handle all repairs or return of the product.

One of the videos on YouTube.com/SaveJobsNC features Karen Lerner, a Registered Nurse, testifying about a fundamental flaw in the program's design that treats home medical equipment and services like a simple commodity.

Beth Bowen agreed with that observation, explaining, "The reality of the situation is that HME providers aren't simply delivery people for equipment, but rather are specially trained service providers.

"When a patient is on home oxygen therapy, the cost of the equipment is only 28 percent of the full cost of caring for the patient. Home oxygen therapy can be paid for in one year at the same rate as just one day in a hospital. Our industry is a cost-saving arm of the healthcare continuum," she added.

YouTube.com/SaveJobsNC is an offshoot of SaveJobsNC.com, an informational website created by NCAMES in its ongoing efforts to educate HME patients, elected officials, and the general public about the restrictive measures put in place by Medicare. The bidding program is implemented through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in Washington, D.C., which is headed by President Obama's controversial recess appointment, Dr. Donald Berwick. Dr. Berwick has been criticized in many circles for his repeated statements supporting healthcare rationing.

More videos will be added to YouTube.com/SaveJobsNC in the near future. For more details on the restrictive Medicare bidding program and its effects on patients and jobs in North Carolina, visit www.savejobsnc.com.

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. Instrumental in passing the nation's first HME licensure law which has been working to ensure quality home health care since 1995, NCAMES continues to advocate for seniors and patients in need. For more information, visit www.ncames.org or call (919) 387-1221.