

MEDICINE

Medicare Costs Analyzed

The controversy and confusion about doctors' rates under the supplementary medical insurance program of Medicare continues, exposing many loopholes—By Faye Marley

► THE KNOTTY PROBLEM of what is a "reasonable" charge under the supplementary medical insurance program of the new Medicare law is rapidly being untied. Business will go on as usual between the Park Avenue doctor and his wealthy patients.

This is the way it will work. The law says that after the initial \$50 deductible amount, the Government, through designated carriers and "fiscal intermediaries," will pay 80% of the reasonable costs or reasonable charges.

The Park Avenue doctor, however, has patients that he knows are able to pay \$2,000 instead of a "reasonable" charge of \$1,000 for an operation.

In such instances, he tells the patient that the Government will reimburse him (the patient) for 80% of the \$1,000, or \$800. The patient then pays the doctor another \$1,200, not a bad arrangement for a "reasonable" charge of \$1,000.

Doctors who are afraid of extra paper work need not worry, SCIENCE SERVICE was told by Wilbur J. Cohen, Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

"We understand the doctors' concern," he said, "but it really will not be much different from Blue Shield."

In fact, Blue Shield is expected to be one of the "fiscal intermediaries" among other

insurance "carriers" to get Government contracts without competitive bidding.

The law broadly defines a carrier with which the Government could contract as a voluntary association, corporation, partnership or other non-Governmental organization lawfully engaged in providing, paying for, or reimbursing the cost of health services under group insurance policies or contracts, or similar group arrangements, in consideration of premiums or other periodic charges payable to the carrier.

The Government expects to enter into contracts with a sufficient number of carriers, selected on a regional or other geographical basis, to permit comparative analysis of their performance. Contracts can be rescinded, or not renewed, if the service is unsatisfactory.

People electing to be covered by the supplementary medical insurance program will pay their \$3.00 fee to the Government, which will match the amount, then turn the money over to a carrier for administration after the carrier deducts a reasonable fee for its administrative work.

The terrible turmoil of reorganization will go along smoothly after a number of consultant meetings are held, and the experience of such organizations as Blue Shield will be called upon to determine the amount of reasonable fees.

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MEDICINE

Ice Aids Snakebite Cure

► FRESHWATER ICE PACKS added to conventional treatments for snakebite have been successful in preventing later disability, especially of the hand and foot.

With conventional procedure such as tourniquet, cutting, suction, antivenin and antibiotics alone, some permanent disability may be expected.

Dr. William E. Lockhart of the Brewster County Memorial Hospital, Alpine, Texas, warned in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* 193:336, 1965, however, that salt should not be added because the tissues would freeze, the blood flow would stop and cell damage would result.

The ice treatment, cryotherapy, can continue for six days as long as the patient's body is kept warm with an electric blanket. Cryotherapy lowers the temperature to approximately 59 degrees.

Treatment of snakebite is controversial, Dr. Lockhart pointed out, "because there is no completely successful method."

More potent antitoxin is needed for snakebite poisoning, Dr. Lockhart said, but antivenins should be more specific for

each species of snake and not have the allergic and other limitations of horse serum.

"Antivenins of human origin from donors previously bitten and 'boosted' or from prison volunteers may be the answer," said Dr. Lockhart.

One of the examples of treatment by freshwater ice packs was that of a four-year-old girl bitten on the leg by a rattlesnake. A ranger immediately packed the leg in cracked ice, applied a tourniquet and brought the child to the hospital in two hours. No incisions were made, but tetanus toxoid, phenobarbital and antivenin were given.

As long as the ice packs were kept up (for four days) the little girl was cheerful, played with her dolls, ate and slept well.

But on the fourth day, Dr. Lockhart decided to discontinue the ice because there was so little swelling or other evidence of poison. Within an hour the child was crying, her temperature had risen to 102 degrees, local swelling began, and the next

day huge toxic skin blisters characteristic of severe rattlesnake bite appeared. She was restless and would not eat. The septic fever continued for a week in spite of procaine penicillin G and streptomycin sulfate given intramuscularly, with chloramphenicol palmitate by mouth. Premature discontinuance of the ice pack was blamed for the resulting twisted foot.

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NUTRITION

'Protein Cocktail' Study Indicates Body Needs

► A "PROTEIN COCKTAIL" consisting of water and amino acids has been developed by University of Wisconsin nutritionists and is being tested in studies in which the students cooperate.

Protein is needed by the body to repair and build tissue, said Prof. Hellen Linkswiler of the university's home economics department, but of the more than 20 amino acids the body requires to construct protein, eight must be taken already made. The body can synthesize the others.

Prof. Linkswiler is using the cocktail in studies to determine the proper ratio of essential and nonessential amino acids in low protein diets. University students cooperating in the studies are placed on a special diet for 50 days, while researchers determine their ability to synthesize proteins.

Results to date have indicated that if the supply of amino acids in the diet is limited, it is important that those acids that are eaten include the eight that cannot be synthesized.

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United States Rubber

FRIGID ZONE—Scientists in the Passaic, N.J., plant laboratory of the U.S. Rubber Company are demonstrating the cold characteristics of a new synthetic rubber called Royalene. The Royalene garden hose on the right is easily tied into a knot at 44 degrees below zero while the plastic hose snaps in two.