

LETTER FROM A LOCAL PATIENT

(Originally published July 1968)

Dear Doctor:

Please pardon the onion skin; I have just had my first contact with Medicare and I think I would like a good case of hives better.

Dr. T _____ did a little surgery for me, and sent his bill to Medicare. He explained that I would have to show Medicare that I had already paid doctors' bills accounting to as much as \$50.00 this year before my Medicare would function; so, I looked up my check stubs and sent Medicare a list of doctors and amounts paid that came to just \$52. Next came a phone call from Medicare; I would have to call in person. I was a little crowded for time as I was getting things in line for a two-week vacation to start on the following Monday, May 6; but the clerk at Medicare told me I would have to have receipted bills for all these charges *showing what the charges were for*. I didn't think about the supposedly confidential nature of doctor-patient relations while I was talking to him, but it occurred to me later. Suppose a man's daughter had been a little naughty and had contracted a less than lady-like malady—would that have to be revealed to the blabbermouths at Medicare?

Well, that doesn't concern me. What does concern me is that I have to write to you and other doctors and ask each of you to waste your time going back through your records and providing me with the details for which I have paid you this year. For your convenience, I will show you in pen and ink at the foot of this letter dates and payments I have made to you.

I wish the Federal Government would keep its bureaucratic paws out of peoples' private affairs; the result is inevitably a useless mass of paperwork for everybody concerned. Do you know, that pipsqueak at the Medicare office even returned to me the slit envelope in which I had sent him my list of payments? I will hereby offer anybody a cash reward of \$25 for a sound, sensible reason for giving me back my slit envelope with the canceled stamp attached.

Before Medicare, the doctor sent me a bill; I sent the doctor a check. There was none of this wasted time and senseless paperwork. That is what government bureaucracy creates.

I am truly sorry to put you through this senseless trouble, but don't blame me; blame BRAINWASHINGTON.

cc: Doctors concerned,
One Congressman
Two Senators
One President of the USA
HEW Headquarters

Sincerely yours, Dick