



# HEALTH CARE NEWS

A Monthly Publication From the New York State Attorney General's Health Care Bureau

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## CONSUMERS MAY SEEK REFUNDS FROM TWO HOSPITALS

Consumers who pay hospital bills for which they are not responsible will receive protection under agreements recently made between Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and two New York hospitals. Individuals who believe that they have been improperly billed by New York-Presbyterian Hospital and Beth Israel Medical Center have until July 22 and August 10 of this year, respectively, to file refund requests. Refund requests should be directed to:

⇒ **Beth Israel Medical Center:** Kisha A. Owen, Customer Service, Continuum Health Partners, at (212) 256-3023.

⇒ **New York-Presbyterian Hospital:** Patient Financial Services at (212) 297-5424.

Under the terms of the agreements, each hospital will provide refunds to consumers who were improperly billed for services that were covered by their health insurance plans. In addition, both hospitals agreed to reform their billing practices. Specifically, the hospitals agreed that, when they submit bills to health plans, they will not bill consumers until the plan notifies them that the consumer may be liable.

Under New York law, applicable to health maintenance organizations, as well as under many contracts between health plans and hospitals, a hospital cannot bill a consumer if the consumer is properly enrolled in the health plan, the services provided are included in the consumer's policy and the consumer followed all the procedural rules in the policy prior to receiving the services. In these instances, the hospital and the health plan should resolve any coverage problems without billing the consumer. Exceptions to this billing pro-

hibition include bills for deductibles, co-insurance, co-payments or other amounts specifically designated by the health plan as the consumer's responsibility.

## Accessing Diabetes Care

Over the past decade, diabetes prevalence among New Yorkers has increased 100 percent. According to the state's health department, more than 1 million New Yorkers, including 13,000 children, have been diagnosed with diabetes and about 430,000 more are unaware that they have it.

To learn more about diabetes or how to get care, here are some helpful links:

- If you have health insurance and are facing a denial of diabetes care or coverage, call the Attorney General's Health Care helpline at 1-800-771-7755 Option 3.
- General information regarding diabetes care, treatment and prevention is available at the American Diabetes Association website: [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org). Information about local programs, events and physicians is also available on the site.
- The New York State Department of Health provides information at: [www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/consumer/diabetes/index.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/consumer/diabetes/index.htm). Useful links include order forms for free educational materials, a publication about kids and diabetes, and other diabetes internet resource links.
- To order a free test to check feet for nerve damage, call the Bureau of Primary Health Care at 1-888-

ASK-HRSA (257-4772) or visit [www.bphc.hrsa.gov/leap/ordering\\_leap\\_filaments.htm](http://www.bphc.hrsa.gov/leap/ordering_leap_filaments.htm).

- Information about expanded Medicare coverage for diabetes services can be obtained from the National Diabetes Education Program at 1-800-438-5383 or visiting [www.ndep.nih.gov](http://www.ndep.nih.gov).
- Diabetes-related care such as foot and eye exams, flu and pneumococcal vaccines, and hemoglobin A 1C tests can be obtained at Community Health Centers. A statewide list of these centers is available at: [www.chcanys.org/index.php?name=publications](http://www.chcanys.org/index.php?name=publications), in the 2004 Annual Report, page 18.
- If you need help paying for your diabetes medicines and supplies, information about drug assistance programs is also available at [www.helpingpatients.org](http://www.helpingpatients.org) and [www.NYAGRx.org](http://www.NYAGRx.org).



## DID YOU KNOW?

The Attorney General has released a report showing that his office's prescription drug price website, [www.NYAGRx.org](http://www.NYAGRx.org), can help New Yorkers compare pharmacies' drug prices and so significantly reduce their out-of-pocket prescription drug costs. According to the report, consumers can save an average of \$17.36 per prescription by choosing to buy their medications at the lowest prices in their area reported on the website. This report also shows that savings of up to \$85 per prescription are possible. To get a copy of the report, go to [www.NYAGRx.org](http://www.NYAGRx.org) or [www.oag.state.ny.us](http://www.oag.state.ny.us).