



South Carolina

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## Medicare Advantage

July 21, 2014

Mr. Tony Kester  
The Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging  
1301 Gervais Street, Suite 350  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Mr. Kester,

I would like to bring to your attention a call we received on July 14 at approximately 12:30PM from Marques Wideman, SHIP counselor for the State of SC. Mr. Wideman's inquiry referenced one of our members, Timmy Lollis.

As background, when handling calls made on behalf of our members we must adhere to strict HIPAA rules with respect to releasing information. In the case of a SHIP counselor, the member must be present to give verbal authorization or the counselor's name must be on the approved list of SHIP contacts.

Mr. Wideman first spoke with Jackie Splattstoesser, who adhered to the HIPAA guidelines. When Jackie informed Mr. Wideman that she would not be able to provide the information he requested he became very upset and immediately insisted on talking with a supervisor. Jessica Landry, the supervisor on duty, took Mr. Wideman's call. He informed Ms. Landry that he didn't have time for this "crap" and that he would be filing a complaint with Medicare and if he filed enough of them we would go on probation. Mr. Wideman would not let Ms. Landry explain anything. He insisted that she give him her manager's name and transfer him.

Ms. Landry then transferred Mr. Wideman to one of our Level II research analysts, Latasha Gladden. Once again Mr. Wideman offered no opportunity for our staff member to assist him; he simply stated he was going to file a complaint and asked for her name.

There is no way for us to know whether or not Mr. Wideman is a legitimate SHIP counselor. We have the entire phone call recorded and will share it with you if needed. In my review I find it to be one of the rudest encounters with a caller that I have heard in my 20+ years with BlueCross.

Mr. Wideman did in fact file a formal complaint with CMS.

I find Mr. Wideman's actions extremely disappointing. We strive to provide the best possible service to our members, but we must do so under the strict regulations that exist to protect our Medicare beneficiaries. In this case, we were appropriately



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following the guidelines listed in the CMS IOM 100-09, Chapter 2 Beneficiary Customer Service, Section 30-Disclosure Desk Reference Guide for Call Centers, where it gives detailed instructions on what is required to release information to a SHIP agent or volunteer. The fact that Mr. Wideman does not like those regulations should not lead him to take what is clearly intended to be a retaliatory action against our Medicare Advantage plan.

I like to ensure that we maintain a positive working relationship with all state agencies, but especially the Office on Aging as we serve the same population. To that end, if your office could provide an updated list of SHIP counselors it would be greatly appreciated and would help us better serve your agency. I believe Mr. Wideman's actions should also be addressed so we can avoid these types of negative encounters in the future. Finally, we would ask that the complaint against our Medicare Advantage plan be withdrawn at CMS.

Please feel free to contact me at 803-264-2500 should you wish to discuss this matter in additional detail.

Sincerely,

E. Steele Pendleton Jr.  
Vice President  
BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina