



Local Success Spurs Growth of Medicare Diabetes Program

Virgin Islands – The success of a diabetic self-management program led by the Virgin Islands Medical Inc., (VIMI) has prompted the Medicare program to expand its efforts to improve diabetes care for medically underserved and disadvantaged populations. The Virgin Islands program is part of the “Every Diabetic Counts” campaign, an initiative to reduce disparities in health care that is sponsored by the US Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

VIMI, the federally designated Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) for the Virgin Islands, has partnered with more than 10 community organizations to bring free, personalized diabetes self-management training to African-American and Latino Medicare beneficiaries in the Virgin Islands since August 2008.

Classes and informational materials teach participants how to best control their blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels; establish relationships with primary-care providers; address better nutrition, housing and regular exercise; and develop support networks of family, friends, and community-based social services.

“Research shows that people who actively manage their diabetes can reduce the risk of debilitating and costly diabetic complications,” said Dr. Cora Christian, Medical Director at VIMI. “Partnerships with organizations like AARP and the American Red Cross have expanded our ability to reach underserved and disadvantaged beneficiaries. As a result, we’re addressing the disparities in diabetes care we’ve observed between different segments of our Medicare population.”

Other community partners supporting VIMI’s work include: the Virgin Islands Medical Society, HOVENSA LLC, Schneider Regional Medical Center, St. Croix Majorettes, Speak the Word Ministries International, Central, Seventh-day Adventist Church and many individuals who volunteer their time to teach the program.

CMS added Mississippi to the “Every Diabetic Counts” campaign earlier this month. Now a total of seven states, including the Virgin Islands are participating in the national program. CMS’s approach takes diabetes education out of traditional health care settings like hospitals and doctors’ offices, and puts it in settings that are more familiar and comfortable.

Together with QIOs in New York, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Georgia, and Louisiana, the Virgin Islands diabetes program led by the Virgin Islands Medical Institute has reached 2,700 Medicare beneficiaries to date.

CMS plans to provide diabetes self-management education to an additional 7,000 Medicare beneficiaries in states participating in the program through the summer of 2011.

For more information about the "Every Diabetic Counts" campaign in the Virgin Islands please visit www.vimipro.org or www.cmspulse.org or call VIMI at 340.712.2400.

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