Sliver of Medicare Doctors Get Big Share of Payouts

By REED ABELSON and SARAH COHEN   APRIL 9, 2014

A tiny fraction of the 880,000 doctors and other health care providers who take Medicare accounted for nearly a quarter of the roughly $77 billion paid out to them under the federal program, receiving millions of dollars each in some cases in a single year, according to the most detailed data ever released in Medicare’s nearly 50-year history.

In 2012, 100 doctors received a total of $610 million, ranging from a Florida ophthalmologist who was paid $21 million by Medicare to dozens of doctors, nurses and marriage counselors, chief among them, who received more...
Small Slice of Doctors Account for Big Chunk of Medicare Costs

Top 1% of Medical Providers Accounted for 14% of Billing, Federal Data Show

A tiny slice of doctors and other medical providers, including one physician who billed more than $20 million alone, accounted for an outsized portion of Medicare’s 2012 costs. WSJ’s Christopher Weaver reports on Lunch Break. Photo: AP.
Data uncover nation’s top Medicare billers

By Peter Whoriskey, Dan Keating and Lena H. Sun April 9, 2014

The Medicare program is the source of a small fortune for many U.S. doctors, according to a trove of government records that reveal unprecedented details about physician billing practices nationwide.

The government insurance program for older people paid nearly 4,000 physicians in excess of $1 million each in 2012, according to the new data. Those figures do not include what the doctors billed private insurance firms.

The release of the information gives the public access for the first time to the billing practices of individual doctors nationwide. Consumer groups and news outlets have pressured Medicare to release the data for years. And in doing so Wednesday, Medicare officials said they hope the data will expose fraud, inform consumers and lead to improvements in care.

The American Medical Association and other physician groups have resisted the data release,
Political Ties of Top Billers for Medicare

By FRANCES ROBLES and ERIC LIPTON  APRIL 9, 2014

The F.B.I. and other law enforcement officials investigated the medical practice of Dr. Solomon E. Melgen.
Joe Raedle/Getty Images
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The Wall Street Journal Staff

For "Medicare Unmasked," a pioneering project that gave Americans unprecedented access to previously confidential data on the motivations and practices of their health care providers.

WINNING WORK

June 10, 2014

Taxpayers face big tab for unusual doctor billings

By John Carreyrou, Christopher S. Stewart and Rob Barry

Ronald S. Weaver isn’t a cardiologist. Yet 98% of the $2.3 million that the Los Angeles doctor’s practice received from Medicare in 2012 was for a cardiac procedure, according to recently released government data.

The procedure is rarely used by the nation’s heart doctors. Patients are strapped to a bed with three
Fairfax Man Whose Son Killed Police Is Arrested
Father Possessed Guns Illegally, Charges Say

By JENNY Martin and Tom JADKINS
Washington Post Staff Writers

The father of the teenager who killed two Fairfax County police officers outside a police station last year was charged yesterday with illegally helping his son obtain the arsenal of guns used in the rampage, including an AK-47 assault rifle.

Brian Kennedy, 50, who lives in Centreville near the Staff District police station, is accused of being on federal terms to obtain the AK-47 and illegally possessing the six other guns that his mentally troubled son, Michael, used to the massacre in May. Michael Kennedy, 18, fired more than 70 rounds that day before police mortally wounded him.

A 21-page indictment, unsealed late yesterday in U.S. District Court in Alexan- dria, portrays a family caught up in a world of guns and drugs. It alleges that Brian Kennedy smoked marijuana with his son and his son’s ‘youth friends’ and that Michael Kennedy’s mother, Margaret, took the guns to a shooting range to practice their marksmanship.

Authorities found guns and marijuana throughout the family’s home, and the indictment goes beyond Kennedy as recurring a friend that the 1.5 grams of marijuana found in a wooden box in the living room was ‘quarantine change.’

Kennedy was arrested late yesterday at

HARVESTING CASH | The Many Definitions of “Rural”

In a few years will become near 90 million.

backwoods areas that were isolated and
poor, struggling to keep their heads above water.

[“Provincetown is many things to many people, and to USDA we’re rural,” said Keith A. Bergman, the town manager. “We’ll take it.”

He isn’t alone.
On Martha’s Vineyard, the USDA guar-

Rural Aid Goes to Urban Areas
USDA Development Program Helps Suburbs, Resort Cities

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Billions in Grants, Loans Go to Areas Near Cities

The US Department of Agriculture has provided more in rural development grants, loans and loan guarantees to 12 counties in metropolitan areas and retirement or resort communities than to those in poor or shrinking rural counties. This map, which highlights these distressed counties, shows the amount of total aid funneled to counties that received at least $25 million over five years.

The US Department of Agriculture has provided more in rural development grants, loans and loan guarantees to 12 counties in metropolitan areas and retirement or resort communities than to those in poor or shrinking rural counties. This map, which highlights these distressed counties, shows the amount of total aid funneled to counties that received at least $25 million over five years.

AID, From A1

More than three times as much money went to metropolitan areas with populations of 10,000 or more ($3.3 billion) as to poor or shrinking rural counties ($1.7 billion). Recreational or retirement communities alone got $8.8 billion.

Among the recipients were electric companies awarded almost $1 billion in low interest loans to serve the booming suburbs of Atlanta and Tampa. Beach towns from Cape Cod to New Jersey to Florida collected federal money for water and sewer systems, roads and beaches. An Internet provider in Houston got $25 million to wire different subdivisions, including one that boast million-dollar houses and an equestrian center.

The USDA's regulations determining eligible rural communities vary from program to program and are often influenced by Congress. There are 46 separate programs under Rural Development. They include low interest housing loans, USDA-backed loans for businesses, USDA-insured loans for farmers, guaranteed loans for community and nonprofit groups.

In some programs, awards are limited to towns with populations of less than 5,000. In others, it's 5,000, 10,000, 20,000 or 30,000. In still others, the USIA bases its decisions on individual streets or blocks, using census data.

"Nobody understands it, I don't understand it," said J. Gregory Crow, a business specialist who works at the USDA's Rural Development office in Harrisburg, Pa. "You may find one area of town is..."
**Data Show Rural Money's Urban Drift**

A Washington Post analysis found that the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development program awards billions each year to areas that are losing population. This money goes to projects such as roads, schools, and hospitals, where the program started in the 1930s. Over the past few years, for example, the program has funded more in grants and guaranteed loans to major metropolitan areas than to rural counties ($8.5 billion). The analysis was based on more than 150,000 actions reported to the government-wide Federal Assistance Award Data System by Rural Development from 2001 to 2007. Touchstone the program contained actions totaling $64.4 billion, about 30% of all the grants, loans and loan guarantees awarded by the three agencies that make up the program. The Post’s review found that an additional $8.6 billion was funneled to counties outside the USDA’s national regions and to remote destinations. For the $64.4 billion that could be analyzed in more detail, the Post found that about 60% of the funds went to less than 375,000 people. (Sara Hales)

MacMillan Pier in Provincetown, Mass., was "considered an essential facility as it is the hub of the local fishing industry and the ferry to Boston," an official said, but the industry is working to attract tourists taken over Cape Cod.

**Subsidized Suburbs**

Rural Development money is not just flowing to neighborhoods and towns it’s also landing on suburban growth. Financial assistance in the form of grants, loans, and loan guarantees is available to suburban areas as defined by the University of Washington’s Rural Health Research Center.

Sara Hales said at a March 2008 hearing, "I believe we should work to find a consistent definition of the term 'rural' that would apply to all of the programs associated agents $7.5 billion in government loans from rural Development to help build MacMillan Pier. In an email, a spokesman for the Massachusetts program explained that the pier was

**Up the New Jersey coast the beach town of Laurelton is Selvedge to the New Jersey Turnpike, a town of more than 3,000 people.**

Up the New Jersey coast the beach town of Laurelton is Selvedge to the New Jersey Turnpike, a town of more than 3,000 people. The population is about 9,000 and the town has a park with playgrounds, a library, and a supermarket. The average price for a house in Laurelton is $290,000.

Mike Barber, the town's chief of police, said, "It's a nice place to live." But would characterize it as New Jersey.

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Register for a Watchdog Workshop this fall

Our Watchdog Workshop series brings affordable training to cities across the country. We'll be in Anchorage, San Diego, Detroit and Salt Lake City this October. Learn more about the program.

Help us plan the 2017 CAR Conference

We're already gearing up for the 2017 CAR Conference in Jacksonville, Florida, and we want your input. Whether you'd like to be a speaker or not, please let us know what you want to see at next year's conference, March 2-5.

Q&A: Chris Davis’s plan to beef up Gannett’s investigative reporting


By Carlett Spike, CJR

When Gannett announced in July that investigative-reporting legend Chris Davis would be joining its team, it was a shock to the industry. In recent years, Gannett had claimed an interest in investing in ambitious reporting after suffering major hits in circulation rates, but among journalists, its persistent reputation was as a corporate cost-cutter. Hiring an editor of Davis’s caliber sends a different message.

Two places Davis edited for the Tampa Bay Times in the past year...

Investigation finds hundreds of workers confined to American fishing boats

By Extra Extra | 09.08.2016

An investigation by the Associated Press found that around 700 undocumented men from Southeast Asian and Pacific Island nations are working dangerous fishing jobs on American boats where they are confined for years. Thousands have been injured or killed on these boats, but U.S. authorities have not been able to stop the abuses.