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Medicare Part D Opens to Scathing Reviews

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“The opening week of the Medicare Prescription Drug benefit was a disaster,” said Judith Stein, Executive Director of the Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc. “If this was a Broadway show, the curtain would already be coming down. No sound investor would stay the course. The implementation of Medicare Part D is leaving the poorest and the sickest beneficiaries without the life-saving drugs they had just last month,” said Ms. Stein.

The Center for Medicare Advocacy has been flooded with calls and requests for assistance to help beneficiaries and advocates understand and use this complicated program. Pharmacies are at a loss to obtain appropriate enrollment information for those dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid, the singularly most vulnerable group of beneficiaries. They tell of patients leaving in tears without their – or their loved ones’ – medications. States are holding special legislative sessions to ease the pain and temporarily pay for necessary drugs with state dollars.

The problems will only get worse. “The very structure of the program, which established private plans to provide the Medicare benefits,” said Ms. Stein “means that these problems may change, but will not end with time, and solutions will be hard to find.” The Medicare agency is just one more player in this high stakes game. It is not calling the shots, and has limited enforcement authority, leaving plans to provide benefits and appeal rights as they wish, while Medicare writes the check.

What is wrong with this picture? It’s not good fiscal or healthcare policy. It doesn’t serve people with Medicare well, and it doesn’t use tax dollars wisely. It is time to stop this show and develop a real Medicare prescription drug program that is simple to understand, uniform for all beneficiaries, and provided as part of the original Medicare program.