

Dear SMP:

I received a package by mail with dozens of urinary catheters that I have never used and was unsure who ordered them. I tried to contact the sender but there was no shipping invoice, and the company was not listed on the internet. A month later, there was a charge on my Medicare Summary Notice (MSN) that a physician I have never heard of had ordered them. It was for a substantial amount of money and Medicare paid. My supplement was then billed the 20% co-pay. What do I do now?



Annie

Dear Annie,

DME encompasses devices used in patient homes, such as manual wheelchairs and walkers, oxygen supplies, blood glucose monitors, and test strips, urinary catheters and collection devices, and devices such as orthopedic braces for knees and backs are among a huge variety of possibilities.

Urinary catheter fraud is a massive durable medical equipment (DME) scam that bilks billions from Medicare. Scammers use stolen identities to bill the government for medically unnecessary catheters that seniors never ordered or received, profiting from the high reimbursement rates for these supplies.

In April 2024, the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General \(HHS-OIG\)](#) began alerting the public about a fraud scheme involving durable medical equipment (DME), specifically urinary catheters. Since that initial alert, the urinary catheter scam has gotten considerably more widespread. An OIG report found that Medicare was paying 3.4 times the actual cost of catheters, which created a massive financial incentive for fraudsters.

The primary estimated cost of the urinary catheter scam to Medicare is between \$2 billion and \$3 billion in fraudulent claims. Recent reports from mid-2025 also link these activities to a massive \$10.6 billion fraud scheme that involved over one million beneficiaries and was part of a larger \$14.6 billion healthcare fraud takedown by the Department of Justice.

Scammers typically billed Medicare for 200+ kits at a time, resulting in suspicious charges ranging from \$1,200 to \$4,000 on individual Medicare statements. Estimates for the scam peaked at \$3 billion in false claims. Total Medicare payments for catheters jumped from \$153 million in 2021 to \$2.1 billion in 2023, driven by just seven high-volume companies.

The Golden Rule of Medicare is medical necessity. A Medicare DME claim is a request for payment submitted to Medicare for medical equipment and supplies ordered by a [Medicare-enrolled physician or treating practitioner for use in a patient's home](#).



Scammers are targeting Medicare enrollees through phone calls, internet ads, and text messages with offers of free services, medical equipment, or gift cards upon confirming their personal information and eligibility for specific Medicare services. Often, the enticement for the individual is that they are “qualified” for items “at no cost” or “free.” Once they have the details, unscrupulous supply companies bill Medicare for hundreds of unneeded catheter kits at a time (often totaling \$1,200 to \$2,400+), even though the patient never received or requested them. In your case the DME was urinary catheters which were sent from a company who had in some manner obtained your Medicare identity.

The fraudulent DME company had obtained its own authorizing provider, who does not have a relationship with you, to sign an authorization for the catheters. The authorization was a prescription for DME products that have no medical necessity, and/or totally unnecessary for your use or medical conditions. The product is shipped and billed. Medicare pays, as does a supplement, and you are left with products that you never ordered or needed.

Stay alert. Be suspicious of anyone who offers you free medical equipment and then requests your Medicare number. If you receive a call from someone offering you free urinary catheters or other DME and services that will be billed to Medicare, hang up immediately. Think about any unsolicited phone calls you may have responded to. If your personal information is compromised, it may be used in other fraud schemes. If medical equipment is delivered to you, don't accept it unless it was ordered by your physician. If possible, refuse the delivery or return it to the sender. Keep a record of the sender's name and the date you returned the items. Review any Medicare statements you receive. Scan for any supplies you did not order.

Medicare enrollees should be cautious of unsolicited requests for Medicare numbers. If you suspect Medicare fraud, your local Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) program can help. Call 877-272-8720 or visit www.stopmedicarefraud.org for help. If you live outside of Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, or Vermont, visit www.smpresource.org or call 877-808-2468 for more information on your local SMP.

Lynn Rosenblatt, RN (retired) & SMP Volunteer



Do you have a Medicare fraud or scam question for SMP?
If so, please email ASK SMP to smp@advisewell.org



Webinar Wednesdays w/ SMP:

July 29th 10:30CT/11:30ET - Did my doctor order this? DME Scams

August 26th 10:30CT/11:30ET - Home Health & Hospice Fraud

Click on links above to register.

