

My name is Rita Hatch. I am a volunteer with the Older Persons Action Group. I am well versed in Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and other Senior issues and as such, I advocate for seniors in Alaska.

The most important issue facing seniors in Alaska today is finding a physician who will take them as new Medicare patients. What good is having a prescription Drug program in Medicare if you can't find a doctor to write a prescription? What good is paying for Medicare Part B, if you can't find a doctor to treat you?

With the assistance of some staff at OPAG, I have an ongoing telephone survey of the medical facilities in Anchorage, to ascertain, which of them will take new Medicare patients.

I have one senior, who is still working and has insurance and she still can't find a doctor to treat her, although in her case, Medicare would be the secondary payer of her bill.

I receive approximately ten calls a week from seniors who are trying to find a doctor who will accept them as new Medicare patients. As of today, there are about twenty doctors in Anchorage, who are still taking new Patients.

Anchorage Neighborhood Center is the only facility still taking new Medicare patients and that facility is being overwhelmed. Providence Family Clinic is no longer taking new patients.

My temporary solution is to offer the names of Nurse Practitioners, who are more than capable of taking care of patients' needs for meds and other physical problems. I have a roster of about ten PA's, whom I currently recommend.

The problem as I see it, is that doctors charge too much for visits and Medicare pays too little. Obviously Alaska needs more doctors, but it takes almost ten years for a new doctor to get into business in Alaska. One answer might be for the State of Alaska to offer incentives to outside doctors to come and practice in Alaska. As far as I know, this problem exists in every city in Alaska.