

Frequently Asked Questions from Patients on the ACO

KEY MESSAGES ON THE ACO

- Your provider is participating in an ACO to help keep patients healthy.
- Nothing about your benefits will change – you are still enrolled in Original Medicare (fee-for-service), are paying your same co-pays and deductibles, and can see any doctor you would like who accepts Medicare.
- Sharing your Medicare data with your primary care health team, such as when you went to see a specialist or were hospitalized, will help them to better coordinate and manage your care to help keep you well.

Questions on the ACO

Question 1: What does it mean that you are in an ACO? Is this an HMO or insurance company?

Answer 1: Our practice has joined up with other physician groups in order to form an Accountable Care Organization. This program is a way for us to give you better coordinated care and make sure we can help you even when you're sick and not in our office.

This means that we will communicate more with other doctors, hospitals, and especially you to make sure you get the care and support you need when you are sick.

The ACO is not an HMO or insurance company. Your benefits are not changing and you can still see any doctor or hospital who accepts Medicare at any time.

Q2: How will this help me?

A2: As part of an ACO, your doctor and health care team will have a more complete understanding of your health through more communication with other health care providers. Our main goal is your health and wellbeing, and the ACO will help us give you better, more coordinated care.

Q3: If you're in an ACO, can I still see whichever doctor I want?

A3: Absolutely – you can see any health provider who accepts Medicare. Nobody, not even our practice or your hospital, can tell you who you have to see.

Q4: Is the ACO part of Obamacare?

A4: Accountable Care Organizations originated under the Affordable Care Act, sometimes known as Obamacare. It is now most driven by the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act that passed in 2015. MACRA, as it is known, passed 92-8 in the Senate and 392-37 in the House reflecting the strong bipartisan support that the ACO concept enjoys. Over 9 million Medicare patients are being treated by an ACO in all parts of the country because of how successful these programs have been so far.

Questions on benefits

Q5: Will being part of an ACO cost anything to me as the patient?

A5: No - your benefits have not changed, so you will not be paying anything more than what you are already paying for Medicare. You will still be able to see any doctor you want and receive care at any hospital you go to.

Q6: Do I have to do anything for the ACO?

A6: No, nothing is required of you. We simply want to keep our patients informed as we deliver the best care we can provide.

Q7: Is anything going to change with seeing you?

A7: We will still be seeing you as we always have, and are going to be working to make sure that if you are unwell that we can address your concerns right away. We will be providing you with more resources if you're unwell outside of the traditional office visit, and would like to know when you have been in the hospital so that we can follow up with you.

Questions on *data sharing*

Q9: Who is my health information going to be shared with? Does this mean the government will know my health information?

A9: Nothing changes about what Medicare, which is a program of the federal government, already receives about your protected health information. Your health information is protected by federal law with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which has strict regulations about who can see your data. We do not provide Medicare with any additional information than what they already have.

The health data sharing discussed in the letter is about giving our practice a better idea of what is happening with your health outside of our office so that we can better coordinate your care. The group of doctors and other health care providers working together in the ACO will be able to combine your medical record with information from Medicare to give you the best experience possible. We are focused on keeping you healthy, in your home, and out of the hospital.

Q10: What health information is going to be shared?

A10: Your provider will already have your personal medical record, but Medicare will also share records with the ACO to help your doctor know about when you went to see a specialist or were hospitalized to help your doctor communicate with other doctors and hospitals to help keep you well. Medicare won't share information with an ACO about any treatment for alcohol or substance abuse without written permission.

What to do if patients have questions you do not feel you can answer

For more information on ACOs, you can direct your patients to:

- Visit www.medicare.gov/acos.html for more information on ACOs.
- Call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) for more information. TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048. This is available 24 hours day/7 days a week.
- Talk to their doctor