

# Medicare Annual Wellness Exam

Written by Board Certified Internal Medicine Physician  
**Susan Fanta, MD**



ARE YOU AWARE MEDICARE PART B COVERED INDIVIDUALS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR A YEARLY PREVENTATIVE VISIT? IF NOT, YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Medical Part B preventative visits were introduced and enacted by the Affordable Care Act of 2010. Many people do take advantage of this, but I suspect many more would if it were understood more fully. So read on, and I'll help improve your awareness of this yearly, preventative visit.

If you are a Medicare patient, there is no doubt you should have a primary care provider (PCP). This is an individual, perhaps a medical doctor (MD), advanced nurse practitioner (CNP) or a physician assistant (PA-C or MPAS) who can educate Medicare Beneficiaries about potentially preventative services and screenings. These services can be arranged and coordinated by your PCP by scheduling your preventative wellness visit. This is not considered a "routine physical check-up," but one does tend to end up with an examination of major organ systems. However, I want to make it clear that technically, an annual Medicare wellness visit does not include a physical exam beyond taking of a height, weight, and blood pressure.

Most providers likely will perform a limited exam to better assess a patient. This expectation of a physical examination has been an area of confusion, and great frustration on the part of both physicians and patients since the inception of this Medicare preventative visit.

## THIS VISIT LIKELY WILL INCLUDE:

- A review of your medical and social history
- Detection of cognitive impairment
- Counseling about preventative services
- An offer to talk about creating an advance directive
- Updating immunizations
- A screening schedule for appropriate preventative Services
- A checklist may be utilized ensuring all aspects are covered

## THE PREVENTATIVE SCREENINGS MAY INCLUDE

- Colon Cancer Screen with Colonoscopy or Cologuard Fecal Test
- Mammogram
- Bone density
- Cholesterol and blood sugar
- Abdominal aortic aneurysm
- Lung cancer screening

Because of its newness, I would like to explain the screening test paid by Medicare for lung cancer. Medicare started paying for this in February of 2015. The service includes a yearly Low Dose Computed Tomography (CT scan) of the chest. Before the first scan, you must visit with your provider to discuss the risk and benefits.



### TO QUALIFY FOR THIS BENEFIT YOU MUST:

- Be age 55-77 and currently smoke or have quit smoking in the past 15 years
- Have smoked an average of one pack per day for at least 30 years
- Have no symptoms or signs of lung cancer
- Receive the chest scan at a qualified radiology facility (of which Yankton Medical Clinic, P.C. is one)

This is just one of many preventative screening services paid by Medicare. There are others as well, and this is just one example of the benefits of scheduling for your preventative exam.

As long as you meet basic eligibility standards, Medicare will cover these services. However, you may be charged additional fees for certain services during this preventative visit. If during your annual wellness visit your PCP needs to investigate or treat a new or existing problem, costs may then apply. For instance, if you are followed for multiple medical problems such as hypertension, diabetes, etc., and these are addressed, this additional treatment could be billed as a separate office visit, with Medicare paying 80% of the allowed charges and the rest applied to your deductible or copay. This additional charge is determined by the complexity of managing the health concerns.

Another important aspect of this wellness visit is an opportunity for your PCP to discuss a Living Will. This document allows you to designate a Durable Power of Attorney and/or detail other wishes about care at the end of life. This obviously can be a sensitive topic, but should be a priority for you to discuss with your chosen, trusted medical provider. Many individuals may set up a living will through a lawyer, and I encourage them to bring this to their PCP so that the document can potentially be reviewed and discussed at your wellness exam.

As you can sense, there is a lot to cover to adequately complete a yearly wellness visit. To make the visit run smoothly, I would encourage you to come prepared. In addition a nurse and social worker may assist in the completion of this visit.

### PLEASE BRING THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

- An active medication list
- A list of any other providers you see
- A list of immunizations received outside of the clinic
- An updated interim health history (for example, if you were traveling in another state or country and had some issues with your heart).

The above information would be vital information for your PCP to review.

I urge you to schedule a wellness visit as this is a great opportunity to assess your health status, update preventative services, and promote overall well being. This has been a good additional service provided by Medicare, and a chance for you to take advantage of some very beneficial screening interventions. Your doctor wants to see you, so they can catch any concerns early, and watch you live as healthy a life as possible.

**For more information, or to set up an appointment for your Medicare Wellness Exam, please call:**  
Yankton Medical Clinic at 605-665-7841  
or Vermillion Medical Clinic at  
605-624-8643.