

Kate: Good morning, and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment, where we feature news and information that you can use to live a healthier life. This is Kate Johnson, and my guests this morning are Summer [Rogness 00:11], who is the Medicare Wellness Nurse and Lake Region Healthcare, and Kristen Rick, the Primary Care Clinical Coordinator at Lake Region Healthcare, here to talk annual wellness visits. Good morning, ladies.

Summer: Good morning.

Kristin: Good morning.

Summer: This is something that is specifically for community members who have Medicare Part B and might not know about this free benefit they have called the Annual Wellness Visit. I want to start out by talking about maybe the premise behind the annual wellness visit and how it matches up with the trend in healthcare to focus on preventive health rather than treating people only when they're sick. Can you maybe speak to that, Kristin?

Kristin: Sure. The annual wellness visit is a service provided by Medicare Part B, and what they're really doing is they're looking at how we can be preventative in our health, how we can prevent the disease before it occurs and also save the patient's medical expenses and increase their quality of life. With this what happens is once we enroll Medicare Part B they don't pay for your annual physical anymore, like we're used to getting. This is kind of Medicare's answer to that, so what you do is you call in to Lake Region and make an appointment, and you meet with Summer, our Medicare Wellness nurse, and she goes through almost the same things that the provider would go through. When was your last mammogram? Is your hearing okay? Is your vision okay? What are your meds? What's your past medical history? If something arises during that, then she can contact the provider or the doctor and explain those issues that are going on and get you in to see your provider if you don't already have an appointment scheduled.

Kate: It sounds like it's much more of a consultative kind of where are you with your health today type of a situation.

Kristin: Right, and patients have said that they really enjoy this, because it's not the quick twenty minutes with my provider, address the problem, see you next time. It's more of like 45 minutes to an hour, visiting with Summer, and she really gets to know what issues are you having at home? Are there safety issues? She can address those and help you with resources in the community if you need those, or referrals, that we can talk to the provider about getting those referrals.

Kate: It sounds much more comprehensive, and also pretty amazing that there's a person who's, this is their job.

Kristin: Right.

Kate: Summer, tell me a little bit about when you see a patient, how long is this visit, and what kinds of things are specifically required by Medicare that you cover in an annual wellness visit?

Summer: When we meet with the patients, I like to spend at least forty minutes to an hour just depending on how long that they have to before they see their provider, and what I'll do is I'll get a set of vitals. We do a cognitive screen. I can do a vision screen, a hearing screen. We go over what testing they've had done, what they might need. If they're outdated with anything, we definitely talk about that, and I'll talk further with the providers to see if they need to have that testing. Then we also go over safety risks at the house, at their home, and if they need any assistance, such as a nurse to come in to help with med refills. Maybe they need a home health aide to come in and just help with general cleaning, and then we also go over diet, exercise, and their vaccinations to make sure that they're up to date.

Kate: Based on the wellness visits that you've conducted so far, what kinds of reactions have you gotten from patients about what this experience is like.

Summer: Most patients who come in really know nothing about the program, so I explain what we're about and what we have to offer. Some are skeptical, but I have to say, I think most of them leave feeling pretty happy and satisfied, and I think they just enjoy the time we talk about a lot of their health issues. It's not so quick, and we have a lot of time just to discuss how they're doing in general and what they can look forward to in the next year.

Kate: Right, and this really is an education process. That's why we're talking about it today. It's because this is different. This is not how we have treated healthcare in the past, and Medicare is recognizing, just like the rest of the country is recognizing, that something does need to change in how we're providing healthcare and how we are spending healthcare dollars, so I think we should talk a little bit more about how this is different than from an annual physical. That's what we're used to. I have my annual physical with my doctor and I do that once a year, and it's that twenty minutes where I get all the critical healthcare needs addressed. How is this different, Kristin?

Kristin: I think how it's different is, like I said previously, it's more preventative. It's proactive instead of being reactive. You can still have your wellness visit with Summer, and then any chronic health problems that you have, you can still have that shorter problem visit with your provider, so this is just another way to get your full spectrum of care, but it's just different how we're doing it with a nurse asking the questions up front and kind of saving the provider's time on their end, so they can see more patients and try to give the care that we need for our community.

Kate: You mentioned this time with Summer being really valuable time that they get to talk one on one, and you really get to fill the role of advocate. I imagine that's pretty fulfilling, to feel like you're that point person.

Summer: Yeah. It's been enjoyable to get to take the time to really discuss their health history,

maybe some medications they might have that I can pass along to the doctors, and it's great when we catch something that they might not know about, that Medicare B offers a free test that they didn't know that they could have or if they came in and I'm able to refer them and help them get extra help that they need that maybe they wouldn't have gotten if they wouldn't have come in that day.

Kate: That's what we want to emphasize, too, is this is a free benefit from Medicare for patients with Medicare Part B. If someone has other insurance that might cover a physical, that's still an option. It's just that we don't want people to get caught in that "I thought I was getting my physical and it was free, but it shouldn't have been a wellness visit," right?

Summer: Right. I think the important thing, too, for our community to know is that when you call in to make this, you should, there are options on our phone tree that you can select the Medicare Part B Wellness Visit, and I think some patients call in for their physical, because that's maybe what their insurance calls it, and there's confusion when they're calling in, because different insurances call their annual physicals their wellness visits, so it's very confusing for patients and for our appointment staff to try to figure out which appointment they want, so we can schedule it appropriately. Just a reminder, when you do call in, that there is an option for the Medicare B participants and that we have people answering those calls that have training on how to schedule that and verify that you have the Part B and are due for your annual wellness visit.

Kate: That's a good point, because it is a once a year benefit, correct?

Kristin: Right. Every 366 days you can get this. If you're brand new to Medicare Part B, you'll have your Welcome to Medicare visit, and you might see paperwork regarding that you receive, and every year after that you'll have the annual wellness visit that you're eligible for.

Kate: Let's talk about if someone wants to call and do that, what's the best way to call and ask more questions or get scheduled for this benefit?

Kristin: If they want to call and schedule, they can just call our 739-2221 and wait for the option to press for your Medicare Part B Wellness Visit. If you have questions you can either call myself at 218-739-6770, or you can call Summer as well, at 218-736-8000, extension 4128.

Kate: We should mention too, because this is, like we said, a topic that I think people are interested in, need more information on, you've been out doing some educational talks to groups, and you're open to that if there's someone out there that maybe has a senior citizen group or a group that already meets and might want to learn about that, so maybe mention your number again, in case that's something that a listener is interested in.

Kristin: Yeah, if you guys need more information and need someone to come out and talk and try to help answer your questions, I'm more than willing to do that. I will be a the senior

center the beginning of January, but if you need me before that, you can call me at 218-739-6770.

Kate: Great. Kristin Rick, primary care clinical coordinator at Lake Region Health Care, and Summer Rogness, the Medicare wellness nurse, answering our questions about the annual wellness visit free Medicare benefit for Medicare Part B patients. Thank you both for joining me this morning.

Kristin: Thank you.

Kate: Kristin, Summer, and Katie, here on Apple a Day, reminding you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.