**Community Members, Health Providers Assess Medicare Information**

Prepared by: Laura Bland, Dennis Epps & Anna Ferguson

Medicare enrollees and health care providers in Washington County expressed concern about the difficulties of choosing the proper health care plan. In an effort to offer unbiased information about and easier access to Medicare health options, local organizations and volunteers organized the inaugural “Medicare Made Easy” for 2009 through Archway Partnership: Health.

Held at Sandersville Technical College, the event attracted more than 70 Medicare patients and health care providers, and was staffed by 30 trained volunteers. Attendees were invited to sit down, one on one, with volunteers to assess health care needs, receive advice about various care options and enroll in the plan best suited for their personal lifestyle.

Event attendees were asked to bring any current prescription medications and their Medicare Red, White, and Blue Card. Volunteers then used the Medicare.gov Web site to identify and compare health plans to better meet the individuals’ needs. Participants were able to ascertain if their current coverage was the best option for them, or if a more affordable plan could be obtained. Each client received 15-30 minutes of counsel from the trained volunteers, and a number of the participants were able to choose and sign up for new plans at the event.

Medicare patient and event attendee Jean Bevill said that the workshop helped her find the plan best suited for her personal needs, and that it would have been difficult to understand the various plan options without the event volunteers. “I’m glad I came. It’s all so complicated and it was very helpful for the volunteer to pull up the different options to help me know what would be the best plan to choose,” Bevill said.

The 2009 “Medicare Made Easy” event was a follow-up to the 2008 Medicare Part D Event coordinated by volunteers through Archway Partnership: Health.

Internal volunteer partner Joann Milam, the Washington County Cooperative Extension Agent, helped conduct and coordinate computer services for the event. Twelve additional students and faculty from the UGA Colleges of Pharmacy and Public Health volunteered and helped Archway plan the event. As well, the CSRA Area Agency on Aging and Georgia Cares provided five staff members to help counsel participants. Other organizational partners were North Pointe Pharmacy and Gifts, Source Care Management, and Washington County Internal Medicine.

**Advancing Community Priorities:** Archway Partnership: Health began in Washington County in 2008 and identified Community Health Education as one of their top 3 priority health issues. The annual “Medicare Made Easy” event is one of many strategies to insert health into the culture of this community, making access and resources to better health care more attainable.