What GAO Found

The 1-800-MEDICARE help line provided accurate answers to 61 percent of the 420 calls we made and inaccurate answers to 29 percent. We were not able to obtain any answers for the remaining 10 percent of our calls at the time we placed them. Most of these calls were not answered because they were transferred to other contractors responsible for processing Medicare claims that were not open for business at the time we called or these calls were inadvertently disconnected. To facilitate accurate responses, the 1-800-MEDICARE help line provides CSRs with written answers—called “scripts”—that CSRs use during a call. When CSRs provided inaccurate information, it was largely because they did not seem to access and effectively use a script that answered our questions. CMS and its contractor do not routinely pretest the scripts to ensure that they are understandable to CSRs or potential callers.

What GAO Recommends

To improve the accuracy of the information the help line provides, GAO recommends that CMS (1) revise procedures so that calls are not transferred to other contractors that are closed, (2) assess current scripts and pretest new and revised scripts to ensure that they are understandable, (3) provide more testing of CSRs’ ability to accurately answer questions and use the results to target training efforts as needed, and (4) monitor the accuracy rate for each frequently asked question and use the results to modify scripts or provide training, if necessary. CMS agreed with the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Leslie G. Aronovitz at (312) 220-7600.