

SHIP Mates Q&A: Becky Hayward, Ohio

Outreach Strategies - OSHIIP in a Hospital

Becky Hayward is an Outreach Specialist for the Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program ([OSHIIP](#)) of the Ohio Department of Insurance. She has been with OSHIIP for two years and brings a background in radio and TV journalism to the network. One of Becky's many responsibilities is the SHIP Mates volunteer program.

OSHIIP's Director Gretchen Margraf created SHIP Mates in 2005 with a grant from the Health Assistance Partnership (HAP). Since then, this program has grown from a pilot project in three hospitals into an annual CMS budget item working in seven hospitals. In two short years, SHIP Mates has assisted more than 1,000 Medicare beneficiaries.

SHIP Mates was created as a national model with replication in mind. Below is a series of answers Becky provided about the SHIP Mates project and how it could work for your program. If you have additional questions about SHIP Mates or want to request a SHIP Mates resource kit, please contact Becky at Rebecca.Hayward@ins.state.oh.us.

What is the SHIP Mates project?

The SHIP Mates project is a partnership between Ohio hospitals and OSHIIP trained volunteers. Each SHIP Mate volunteer attends a 20-hour comprehensive training course on Medicare, Medicaid, Medicare Advantage plans, Medicare Part D, Medicare supplemental insurance, and other health insurance related topics.

SHIP Mate volunteers are tasked with the important job of visiting with Medicare patients in the hospital and introducing them to the OSHIIP program. Patients receive much needed help that they are not finding elsewhere, and they appreciate the personal interaction.

Another important component of the program is the SHIP Mates resource kit. SHIP Mate volunteers deliver kits to patients that include a box to organize their medical bills, as well as information on resources in the community and the OSHIIP program, so patients know who they can contact after they leave the hospital. We have seen that people who receive the SHIP Mates box are receptive and grateful to have this real and important resource.

How did the program come about? Why this concept?

SHIP Mates was created as a way to reach people in a time of need, in most cases during a hospital stay. Patients have both medical and financial needs when they are hospitalized. Often, nurses and doctors are being asked questions about Medicare payments and hospital bills that they are not equipped to adequately answer.

When a patient comes into the hospital carrying a SHIP Mates resource kit, hospital staff immediately know to connect the patient with a SHIP Mates volunteer. This results in a better experience for the patient and more efficient use of hospital resources.

What does a typical day look like for a SHIP Mate volunteer?

It's hard to say what a typical day might look like, because each program runs differently, but a SHIP Mate volunteer might spend his or her day doing room visits, which means going around to all the Medicare patients describing the resource box and OSHIIP.

SHIP Mates may also help with some on-site patient counseling and education. For example, we have seen patients who receive hospital bills and immediately pay the bill when it is likely that Medicare would have covered at least some of the bill. Because SHIP Mates are knowledgeable about Medicare and other forms of health insurance, they are in a unique position to counsel patients about charges and/or direct them to the local Quality Improvement Organization to begin the appeals process.

Where would you like to see the project go?

Ultimately, we would like to see at least one SHIP Mate for each of Ohio's 88 counties, but since not every county has a hospital, the program may have to expand to include critical care facilities.

Currently, I reach out to new hospitals through the critical access partnership groups and the Ohio Hospital Association. Because SHIP Mates develops partnerships and helps each partner hospital expand its resources, we have seen an increase in hospitals since the project started in 2005. We even had one hospital join after they heard about the success of the program from a colleague.

What might SHIP Mates look like in another state?

The SHIP Mates project changes depending on the facility that uses the concept. While there is a model, it doesn't have to be implemented exactly so.

What types of SHIP programs would SHIP Mates work well for?

SHIP Mates would work well for SHIP programs that are trying to spread throughout the state. It is a good proposition; OSHIIP staffers come to the hospital with a tangible product in the form of the SHIP Mates resource kit, and all the hospital needs to do is provide a volunteer who, after the 20-hour training session, becomes a SHIP Mate.

HAP's [Volunteer Program Toolkit](#) provides additional tips on expanding your volunteer program.