
Beneficiary Perspective

Karen Davis, Ph.D.

This executive summary of Karen Davis' remarks was prepared by Julie Snyder of the University of Texas LBJ School of Public Affairs. The remarks were given in the context of a panel presentation moderated by Davis, entitled "Beneficiary Perspective."

In her opening remarks, Davis expressed her debt of gratitude to Wilbur Cohen for his pivotal role in the formation of Medicare and to Dorothy Rice, for whom she worked as a Brookings Fellow in 1970. It was under Rice's supervision that Davis was first exposed to the intricacies of Medicare.

Since the creation of Medicare, the elderly by and large have enjoyed both health and economic security. Medicare has also improved the access to care of low income and minority beneficiaries and was instrumental

in spurring desegregation in the health care system. Medicare should also be credited with catalyzing research and technological advancement.

As we continue to wrangle with Medicare, it is imperative to keep the picture of the Medicare population in mind. When we envision this needy population, where 1 in 10 recipients are over 85 years of age and where 75 percent of all beneficiaries have incomes of under \$25,000, we will face the challenges more sympathetically and more creatively. Medicare faces an uncertain future and the task of restructuring is daunting. However, the opportunity for creative restructuring does exist and we must tackle this awesome challenge with both creativity and innovation.