

January 5, 2004- "Data Demonstrates Power Wheelchairs and Scooters Generate Savings For Medicare" PR Newswire

BRYAN, Texas, Jan. 5 /PRNewswire/ -- Each **Medicare** recipient who retains mobility through the use of a **power wheelchair** or scooter saves taxpayers more than \$5,300 over a three-year period after paying back **Medicare's** original expenditure, according to a new national study. These savings, which could total in the billions of dollars, are the result of those individuals remaining healthier overall than others who do not have the benefit of such assistance.

The yearlong study carried out by RRC Inc., a nationally recognized research group with broad healthcare expertise, was initiated by The SCOOTER Store on behalf of the durable medical equipment industry. Members of the Bryan, Texas-based RRC project team included a number of past and current professors at neighboring Texas A&M University.

The researchers utilized comprehensive data from the Centers for **Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)** on a sample of five percent of all **Medicare** beneficiaries in the years 1994 - 2001. Total healthcare costs paid for those who received mobility assistance based on medical necessity was compared against total costs paid for a control group of **Medicare** beneficiaries who had similar diagnoses and would have qualified for power mobility vehicles, had they submitted a claim.

Dr. Donald R. House, president of RRC, said that in addition to the quality of life enhancement for recipients of power vehicles, **Medicare** receives net dollar savings from purchasing such equipment for those whose mobility problems require such assistance.

"We found that statistically significant savings persisted for at least 12 quarters after obtaining the powered vehicle. These research findings are consistent with declarations made by many of those utilizing this equipment and other published works. The powered vehicle appears to enable qualified individuals to remain mobile longer, which reduces total Medicare claims over this period," he said.

Dr. House said that the study tracked total Medicare claims paid for the sample subjects following actual delivery of a power wheelchair or scooter and for sample subjects who would have qualified for such equipment, had they made such a request. The claims comparison between these two groups formed the basis of the study.

Doug Harrison, president and founder of The SCOOTER Store, said that the academic study was undertaken to quantify the relationship between a person's ability to maintain his or her freedom and independence through power mobility equipment and overall health.

"When we call on our customers to see how they are doing and to answer any questions, almost without fail they appear happier, healthier and more able to enjoy life after they have regained their mobility," Harrison noted. "The study findings confirm more than a decade of experience and anecdotal evidence that we have seen on the positive health impact of retained mobility.

"This is good news for the elderly, good news for the Medicare system and good news for the U.S. taxpayer," Harrison said.

He explained the study identified a statistically significant number of individuals who would qualify to receive a power wheelchair or scooter through their Medicare benefits, but had not done so. "By educating this audience, and by working more closely with physicians and Medicare, we can save even more money for the system and give a greater number of seniors the mobility they need to enhance their lives."

Other industry leaders said that the study supports widespread perceptions based on years of interaction with seniors.

"We see over and over, and have felt intuitively, that personal mobility leads to fewer other health-related expenditures," said Scott Meuser, Chairman and CEO of Pride Mobility Products Corp., a major manufacturer of power wheelchairs and scooters. "These findings document the fact that while increased mobility leads to a better quality of life, it also results in significantly lower Medicare costs related to aging."

Eric Sokol, director of the Power Mobility Coalition (PMC), an industry trade association, said that savings to Medicare directly related to increased mobility are important to understand from a public policy perspective. "Total savings to Medicare could have been several billion dollars, but what is even more important is that there remains a tremendous opportunity for more savings," he said. "Investing in mobility pays tremendous dividends to both Medicare and Medicare beneficiaries through better overall health and reduced medical expenses."

The study found the most significant savings were in inpatient expenses related to hospitalization. Other major savings were found in home health care, skilled nursing and carrier costs. Such savings do not take into consideration savings that accrue to Medicaid as a result of many elderly Americans being able to delay or forego the need for more expensive nursing home care.

Dr. House said that independent researchers have reviewed and approved the study's methodology, and that further analysis will be conducted once 2002 data is available from Medicare.

Copies of the executive summary of the study are available upon request.