At long last Medicare cards get a makeover to protect seniors from identity theft

As taken from a September 18, 2017 story from the Washington Post, by Michelle Singletary

The standard advice for people to protect themselves from identity theft is to be sure you don’t carry around documents that can be stolen by a crook. So when it comes to your Social Security card, please leave home without it — unless there is a specific reason you must have it. We all know that our 9-digit number is the key to opening doors to a lot of our financial information. But such advice often frustrates those 65 and over. Why?

Because our government idiotically made people’s Social Security number also their Medicare claim number and put it on their medical card, something that they shouldn’t leave home without. For years, seniors and consumer advocates begged the federal government to remove Social Security numbers from the cards. Well, the time has come – or at least will be here in 2018.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) revealed the new look for Medicare cards, which will – thankfully – now have a unique and randomly assigned numbers and uppercase letters that replaces the current Social Security-based number. The agency will mail out the cards in April. “The goal of the initiative to remove Social Security numbers from Medicare cards is to help prevent fraud, combat identify theft, and safeguard taxpayer dollars,” CMS Administrator Seema Verma said.

As the rollout continues, please be careful of the scams that are sure to crop up. “Scam artists may try to get your current Medicare number and other personal information by contacting you about your new Medicare card,” CMS says.

Here are some clues that someone calling is trying to con you:

- You are asked to confirm your Medicare or Social Security Number so they can send you a new card.
- You are told that you have to pay a fee for the new card and you need to verify your personal information.
- You may be told your health benefits will be cancelled if you don’t share your Medicare number or other personal information.

CMS says if someone calls you and asks for your Medicare number or other personal information, hang up and call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).