

Be On the Lookout for Cardiogenetic Testing Fraud



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Cardiogenetics is a quickly growing subspecialty of cardiovascular medicine that focuses on the genetic causes of heart disease. Cardiogenetic testing often includes genetic testing and counseling, cardiovascular evaluations, and treatment plans for such cardiac conditions as heart failure, arrhythmias, and lipid disorders. Although cardiogenetics has already resulted in positive advancements in the field of cardiology, the scammers wasted no time in taking advantage of this modern technology. The schemes have involved the usual fraud categories (billing for services not rendered, medically unnecessary services, and identity theft), but individual complaints submitted by the SMPs have highlighted some unique trends.

In December 2019, the SMP received its first genetic testing fraud complaint that mentioned cardiac matters. The complaint, which was submitted by the Arkansas SMP, involved an individual who was marketing genetic tests to individuals, physicians, and hospitals. The individual of concern advertised on Facebook, was associated with a "full service" laboratory, often performed tests at a local senior center, and offered various genetic tests to detect the risk of Alzheimer's disease, cancer, urinary tract infections, addictions, and cardiac conditions. In combination, these are red flag indicators of a genetic testing scam.

In 2020, the SMP received six cardiogenetic-related complaints. These complaints were often in combination with other known fraud schemes – including the marketing of pain creams, back braces, and telehealth visits and attempts at identity theft. A common factor in several of the 2020 complaints was faxes that were sent to primary care physicians to solicit signed orders for durable medical equipment and diagnostic tests (including genetic and cardiogenetic tests) on behalf of beneficiaries who did not need or request them.

In 2021, the SMP received 215 complaints – a significant rise indicating an emerging fraud trend. As the year progressed, the SMP Resource Center began to see complaints mentioning the need for genetic tests due to cardiac risks from COVID-19. This was not unexpected, as criminals are often opportunistic and their scams follow pandemic trends. For example, the Tennessee SMP received a complaint regarding a robocaller who told a beneficiary



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that Medicare was requiring a wellness check due to COVID-19 and then asked the beneficiary about having pacemaker or heart issues potentially target them for a medically unnecessary cardiogenetic test. In August 2021, the SMP Resource Center issued a [Cardiovascular Genetic Testing Tip Sheet](#) to help educate and protect beneficiaries from this evolving scam.

The figures for 2022 are still being calculated, but it is likely that cardiogenetics testing complaints will continue to rise. In one 2022 case, the California SMP received information about a beneficiary who purportedly received an unsolicited call from the Centers for Disease Control regarding a survey for heart implications due to COVID-19. The beneficiary indicated the caller already had their name, date of birth, and address. The caller claimed to be from a health screening company and asked about the beneficiary's medical issues. The beneficiary provided information regarding a specific diagnosis and was then told by the caller they were eligible to get a cardiac genetic test in exchange for providing their physician's name. The beneficiary was instructed to call a specific number once they received the genetic testing kit. They were also told that one of the company's doctors would conduct a telehealth appointment to authorize the test if the beneficiary's physician did not respond.

As cardiogenetics fraud continues to evolve, it should be noted the SMP has seen some variations in the names of this scheme. These include the terms cardiogenomics, cardiology genetics, cardio/cardiac/cardiovascular genetic screening or test, comprehensive cardiovascular panel or genetic kit, hereditary cardiovascular profile, and other variations. Some scammers are even taking advantage of the common abbreviation for cancer genetic screening (CGx) by aligning it with some form of "cardio genetics" to give an air of legitimacy to their scam. The detailed and timely complaints submitted by the individual SMP programs have greatly contributed to being able to track efforts involving this scheme. Please continue to get the word out about cardiogenetic testing fraud and be on the lookout for cardiogenetics schemes. 