

## Seniors shouldn't pay to collect benefits

Written by

**The Register's editorial**

5:46 PM, Sep. 27, 2010|

"It's really about taking advantage of seniors."

That's how Cathy Hicks of Windsor Heights described what happened to her 94-year-old mother. A man who identified himself as a "certified senior advisor" held a meeting at the senior community where her mom lives. He was informing elderly veterans and their spouses about a special benefit to help pay for medical and assisted-living costs.

By the time Hicks got involved, the man had all her mom's financial information and a plan: Move her assets to make her appear to have less money and be eligible for a monthly government check.

His estimated fee to help the widow of a veteran: \$3,000.

Hicks said her mom does not need the financial assistance and did not sign up for the benefit. She was troubled by what amounted to a man targeting seniors to make a buck for himself.

It is taking advantage of seniors. It's also

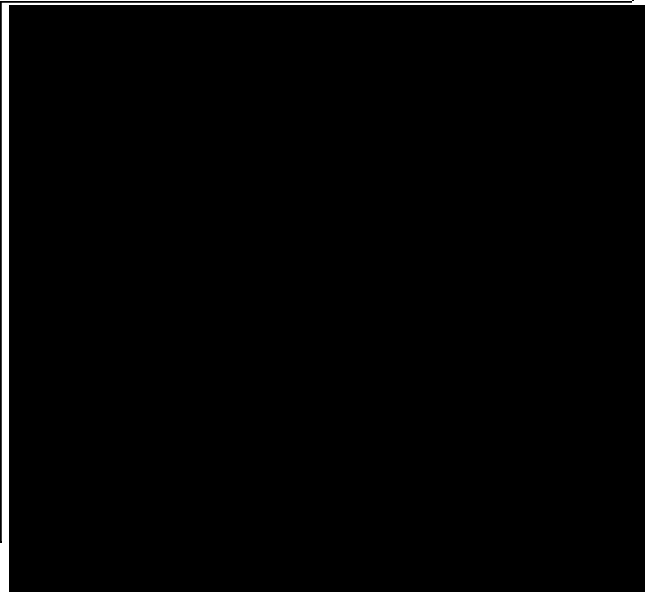
taking advantage of taxpayers who should be funding benefits only for those who really need it. Not to mention transferring assets can have dangerous consequences - namely, later preventing seniors from qualifying for Medicaid to pay for long-term care.

What the money manager did may be legal, but targeting seniors is not right.

"They've reached the age where they're likely to have a problem," said Hicks. "A hearing problem, vision problem or processing information. Like 98 percent of the people made the assumption he was with the VA."

He wasn't. And what happened with her mother is not an isolated incident.

The Register recently reported the story of a man offering the same type of "help" to seniors in an independent living community. He is facing numerous legal and regulatory problems and does not have a broker's license.



Last week, an editorial writer visited Walnut Ridge in Clive, a senior living community where two "lifetime financial advisors" and an attorney were holding a meeting with seniors about the veteran benefit.

The women giving the presentation said they didn't charge to fill out the application for people. However, people may need to "move assets" to be eligible for the benefit. If attorneys and financial planners do that for clients, they earn money from fees and commissions.

But government workers, including those at the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, will help lowans fill out the applications for free. They may not help you finagle your assets, but they also won't try to sell you an annuity or put your money in someone else's name. They don't charge a commission.

"The thing to remind your readers is they do not have to pay to apply for these benefits," said Elaine Buehler, public affairs specialist at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Everyone understands sales people, including those in finance and insurance, make money when people buy their products or services. But residents of senior living communities - such as Hicks' 94-year-old mother - can be especially vulnerable targets. Seniors and their families need to be aware of the risks involved, and agents peddling insurance policies, financial services or medical products to elderly lowans should check their consciences before taking advantage

of elderly lowans.

## Learn more

For more information about the "Aid and Attendance" benefits for veterans or spouses of veterans - or any other vets benefit - contact the VA directly at 1-800-827-1000 or [click here for their website](#).

[Click here for more information about checking on financial brokers in Iowa](#)

[Click here to find out more about licensed agents in Iowa.](#)

