

VGM takes off gloves in NCB fight

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The VGM Group announced an aggressive campaign yesterday to stop competitive bidding by contributing \$50,000 to a non-profit group it created to lobby against the Medicare reimbursement cut scheduled for 2007.

"We don't know if we're going to accomplish anything, but so far, no one has accomplished much," said Jim Walsh, president of VGM Management, Ltd. "After three years of intense industry efforts, we still ended up with competitive bidding, and we have been unable to alter the course of the law since it was passed. We are not unhappy with the industry's efforts; everyone is trying. It's just not working."

VGM has named its non-profit group Last Chance for Patient Choice. Technically, the effort is a 527 not-for-profit organization. The Internal Revenue allows 527s to engage in educational, information and advocacy activities; 527s cannot campaign against a particular candidate.

Last Chance for Patient Choice plans to target congressional districts represented by congressmen like Bill Thomas, R-Calif., who supported competitive bidding, Walsh said.

In those districts, VGM will mount informational campaigns designed to educate voters on how competitive bidding will drive independent HMEs out of business and deprive beneficiaries of choice and quality care, Walsh said.

"It may turn out that those congressmen don't care," Walsh said. "They're never voted for us in the past, but if nothing else it may make them explain to their constituencies why they are doing this."

VGM will also partner with organizations likely to be future targets of competitive bidding, and beneficiary groups that could be adversely affected by competitive bidding.

"Someone who knows D.C. will say 'This isn't going to get you anywhere, being confrontational and getting congressmen mad at you'," Walsh said. "I might say, 'You may be right, but your way isn't working and it is too close.' We can't keep waiting."