

LCPC Mounts Offensive Against Enemies of the Industry

WATERLOO, Iowa –Nobody should have been surprised by the January 24 Last Chance for Patient Choice’s rally at the Bakersfield, Calif., office of U.S. Rep. Bill Thomas, the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee.

The gauntlet was thrown down in October by VGM CEO and Founder Van G. Miller in a commentary he wrote for HME News (Oct. 19 issue of the Medtrade Show Daily, page 14).

“I have decided to take off the gloves and fight as if our lives and the lives of our patients depended on it. To paraphrase ‘Network News,’ I am mad as hell, and I’m not going to take it quietly anymore.”

In that same issue, it was announced that VGM had formed a 527 non-profit organization, Last Chance for Patient Choice, the goals of which include targeting the congressional districts of those who supported competitive bidding, which LCPC maintains will eventually create a two-tier health system that will saddle the poorest and sickest members of our society with cut-rate equipment and services.

Since that time, the Budget Reconciliation Act has added more fuel to the fire by capping oxygen equipment rental at 36 months, and leaving Medicare beneficiaries high and dry with no reasonable means to service the sophisticated equipment that keeps them alive.

“Some who know D.C. will say this isn’t going to get you anywhere, being confrontational and getting congressmen mad at you,” said Jim Walsh, president of VGM Management, Ltd., and general counsel to The VGM Group. “I might say, ‘They might be right, but the nice way isn’t working.’ We can’t keep waiting.

“We at VGM and many in our industry have tried to stop this punishment of home-care patients by arguing logically with administrators and legislators to no avail. Those who will listen almost always say they agree with us but that they can’t do anything to help. Those who will not listen seem unreachable by anyone and free to make the wrong decision regardless of the consequences.”

Walsh notes that neither the competitive bidding provision of the Medicare Modernization Act nor the more recent oxygen cuts were voted on “in an open manner that would hold individual members of Congress accountable. Competitive bidding or more accurately, selective contracting, was stuck in the middle of the prescription drug bill. And the most recent oxygen cut was literally inserted into the Budget Deficit Reduction Act in the middle of the night by a conference committee.”

“Many inside our own HME ‘tent’ tell us to ‘give it up,’ readjust our deck chairs and enjoy the rest of trip on our Titanic. I for one am not ready to do that. I can’t, and you shouldn’t,” Miller adds.

Last Chance for Patient Choice is running a television commercial in the Bakersfield market through this week. ([To view it, click here](#)) In it, viewers are urged to call Republican Bill Thomas's office and ask him to explain the Medicare cuts he advocates.

This is the first national effort to raise awareness by Last Chance for Patient Choice, but it will not be the last. Other rallies and media campaigns are planned throughout the country. Watch the Web site, lastchanceforpatients.org for updates.

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