Aging Lifestyles: Is Medicare an offer graying godfathers can't refuse?

by Joe_Volz

Now that we are living so much longer, it seemed only a matter of time before one group of Americans, who had not taken much advantage of Medicare over the years, would sign up.

Mobsters never used to live long enough to be eligible for Medicare on their 65th birthdays. They were rubbed out long before that.

The cases of the late Tommy Eboli and Crazy Joey Gallo are illustrative.

Tommy, who took over the Genovese Mafia family in New York, was wearing a powder blue jumpsuit, with a big gold cross dangling around his neck, when he got his in front of his girlfriend's house in Brooklyn in the 1970s. Crazy Joey was gunned down right in the middle of a scungilli dinner at Umberto's in Greenwich Village.

And there were legions of other Mafiosi who died of lead poisoning, too.

But now, for some inexplicable reason, mobsters are living to old age. At least some of them. Maybe, a good hit man is hard to find these days.

So, it was intriguing to read the other day about Albert Facchiano, who has just turned 97 and is appropriately nicknamed the "Old Man." I was unable to find out if the Old Man had joined the AARP, whose slogan is "the power to make it better."

Facchiano isn't exactly into making things better. He has an arrest record dating back to 1932.

But these days, he sure needs Medicare.

Facchiano's lawyer was all broken up when he told a judge in a Florida federal court the other day that the Old Man was suffering from all sorts of ailments - back pain and arthritis were a couple. He goes to the doctor four times a week

Not that Facchiano was in court complaining about his Medicare coverage. The Associated Press reports that he had bigger problems. The Old Man had been bagged for a few recent illegalities - overseeing robberies, money laundering and bank fraud on behalf of the Genovese Mafia family.

The Old Man definitely was not a picture of health as he limped into court with a cane to plead guilty to racketeering conspiracy.

He could have gotten 30 years in the slammer, which would have made him 127 when he got out if his health didn't get worse. But prosecutors recommended house arrest, instead.

Unfortunately, although the federal government would have picked up the tab for any medical expenses in prison, Medicare doesn't pay for home health care for more than a few weeks.

Covering the Mafia again brought back memories of my salad days as a young reporter in New Jersey. I got my start on the Mafia beat, reporting on New Jersey's own homegrown organized crime family, headed by Sam "The Plumber" DeCavalcante.

But when I moved to Maryland 30 years ago, where the crime is of a decidedly different caliber - mainly disorganized - I was distraught.

Down in Maryland, I encountered a bunch of nonviolent criminals, like Vice President Spiro Agnew.

Frankly, their nonviolent exploits weren't as colorful.

There just had never been a strong Mafia representation in Maryland. Marylanders like to do their hunting on horses rather than in getaway cars. So, I began to cover the aging beat, instead, never realizing that, one day, both assignments would overlap.

When stories like the Facchiano caper came along, I longed for the old days up north, writing articles that wrote themselves, like the one about the New Jersey mobster testifying before a U.S. Senate investigating committee.

When he was asked if he lived in New Jersey, the hood replied, "I refuse to answer on the grounds that it might tend to incriminate me."

Now, can you imagine that?

Just living in the Garden State was enough to incriminate a person. It didn't make any difference how old you were.

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