

HOSPITAL BILL IS 4 YEARS OLD

Trap

One evening while at home, Joyce was upset to receive a call from a collection agency saying she owed money for a hospital stay four years ago. She did not recall getting any bills from the hospital at that time and thought her insurance had paid for the entire hospital stay. How can they attempt to collect from her after all this time?

Tips

How old is too old? Debts that are so old they are beyond the point at which a creditor or debt collector may sue you to collect are called “time-barred debts.” In Florida, civil court actions are not permitted unless they are within the time limits prescribed by law (Chapter 95). For most debts not involving real property, the time limit is four or five years. In some situations the time limit can be reset when any kind of payment was made on the principal or interest owed. Even if you can’t be sued, the creditor or a debt collector may continue contacting you to pursue payment of the debt as long as the company does not violate the Federal Fair Debt Collection Act.

Steps to take:

- Send a letter requesting an original itemized bill. Is this your debt? Older debts are often sold to collection agencies without proper documentation to show who is responsible. Were all the services listed actually provided to you during that hospital stay? And are the services listed more than once when they were only provided once?
- Compare the itemized bill with your own records to determine if you already paid the bill. Compare it with your insurance “Explanation of Benefits” (EOB) to see if the bill was submitted to your insurance company and what was paid.
- Contact your insurance company regarding any error in billing; some insurance companies reward patients with a percentage of monies recovered when hospitals or other providers overcharge.
- Contact the original creditor and ask them to review their records to verify that payments were correctly credited to your account.

For more information: Contact the Federal Trade Commission (<http://www.ftc.gov>) or call 1-877-FTC-HELP; OR call Palm Beach County Consumer Affairs at 561-712-6600 (Boca/Delray 888-852-7362 toll free)