Here are the FAQs (frequently asked questions) about Mail Service Pharmacies:

Question 1: Who owns and operates the mail order pharmacies?

Mail Service Pharmacies are owned and operated by Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) that are selected by your employer to assist with the day-to-day management of your company's pharmacy benefit.

These companies entered the "mail" pharmacy business to reap windfall profits from filling prescriptions for the vital medications that patients like you take on a regular or daily basis (usually filled for 90-day supplies)

Question 2: Who are these PBMs exactly?

Medco ®, Express Scripts ® and CVS Caremark ® are the most well-known PBMs and own the largest mail service pharmacies. Many of the smaller PBMs don't own mail order pharmacies and will "outsource" their mail service prescriptions to the larger PBMs. In these cases, there are at least two companies seeking to make a profit from a patient's prescription.

Question 3: Do the mail service pharmacies work closely with my community based pharmacist?

No. The mail service pharmacies usually insist that your Pharmacy Benefit Plan prohibit your community based pharmacist from filling prescriptions for the medications you take regularly. Their windfall profits depend on having exclusive rights to fill patient prescriptions without competition from community pharmacies or other mail services

Question 4: Where are these mail service pharmacies located and how do I get advice or get my questions answered if I can't work with my community pharmacist?

For the overwhelming majority of patients, mail service pharmacies are out-of-state operations. These are not traditional pharmacies. They look more like a factory with multiple machine-operated assembly lines that fill orders across 2-3 work shifts. If you have a concern, problem or question, you can send an email or call a 1-800 number to speak with an out-of state corporate pharmacist. In most cases, you'll get a different corporate pharmacist each time you call.

Question 5: Do these mail service "factories" ever make mistakes filling prescriptions?

All factories make mistakes – that's why there are recalls for automobiles and other products. Patients that have been forced to purchase their medications from out-of-state pharmacies have reported delays in receiving their medications, temperature-sensitive drugs being left outside, drugs lost in transit, medication switching and even the wrong drug being shipped. This has caused patients to be unable to take medications that are vital to their health and well-being.

Question 6: Why can't my community pharmacist fill the prescriptions for the medications I take regularly and deliver them to my home?

In most cases, your local pharmacist can - if the mail service pharmacies haven't convinced your pharmacy benefit plan to prohibit it or contractually limited your pharmacist from doing so.

Question 7: Why is my pharmacy benefit plan suggesting that I use the mail service pharmacies?

Survey after survey has confirmed that the overwhelming majority of patients prefer to obtain their medications from a local pharmacy. The mail service pharmacies are aware of this preference, so, they "hard sell" pharmacy benefit plans on prohibiting the use of community pharmacies. They even go so far as a to slightly reduce the co-payment to incent the use of their out-of-state pharmacies, Additionally, the PBMs promise significant savings to your pharmacy benefit plan that are never guaranteed and are seldom delivered..

Question 8: How can I avoid using the out-of-state mail service pharmacies?

Express your concern by writing or calling the appropriate person in your HR department or at your plan sponsor. Contact other plan members and ask them to express their concern as well. They will appreciate your input. Bear in mind, that once you're enrolled in with the PBM-owned mail order pharmacy, you a virtual "captive" patient. No matter how poor the service or the care, you can't discontinue the use of mail order. The best way to avoid this captivity is to vigorously voice your concerns up front.