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Hospitals fight back in bed reduction skirmish

By SANDRA ARMBRUSTER

Community hospitals are organizing to fight plans calling for a decrease in hospital beds to lower health care costs. The Michigan Association of Community Hospitals and Physicians is planning meetings throughout the metropolitan area as part of that fight.

One such meeting last week at St. Mary Hospital in Livonia gathered hospital administrators and staff, state legislators and community leaders to share information about the so-called debedding plan and opposition to it.

"We were shocked when we learned of the problems coming out of the Comprehensive Health Planning Council," State Rep. Wilbur Brotherton, R-Farmington, told the group. "In the legislation we passed, we included language to make sure that smaller hospitals and

people who work there would be protected."

Concern over CHPC plans prompted a joint administrative rules committee of the state Legislature to call for a moratorium on implementing debedding, to form a committee to study the CHPC and to reject 1980 guidelines and rules.

Using federal funding, the CHPC is a non-profit group formed to plan health care for southeastern Michigan. The private group approved a debedding plan last Wednesday in order to meet a March 31 deadline set by the state for coming up with the plan.

"The thing that shocked us most was what we thought we were up to was a plan that said let's identify hospitals with unused beds, taking them out of service and bringing down costs," said Brotherton. "Some said the only solu-

tion is to close small hospitals. The point is that's the kind of psychology we're struggling with.

"The problem is mainly in southeast Michigan, but it is evident that there is concern elsewhere," he added.

The hospital group asked concerned residents to write to Brotherton at 2204 Capitol Building, Lansing 48909, or to State Sen. Robert Geake at 222 1/2 Capitol Building, Lansing 48909.

Geake, R-Northville, said that debedding was one of three areas identified for cost savings programs in health care. Others are limiting the number of licensed specialties in the field and limiting third party payers, such as insurance groups.

Geake, whose district includes Livonia, Plymouth and Redford Township, said the legislature hoped to limit the increasing number of health care sub-

specialties and to force consumers to make sure costs are reasonable by limiting third parties paying for health care.

Debedding has presented a dilemma for hospitals, according to Geake. "We told hospitals to look at the beds in use. If beds weren't fully utilized, then they didn't need them. If beds were full on weekends when only minimal care is given, then we told hospitals they were wasting money," explained Geake. "This led to disappointment and bitterness."

Lack of beds is actually a problem at St. Mary Hospital and Garden City Osteopathic, according to Dr. Richard Horsch, vice president of the community hospital group and chief anesthesiologist at St. Mary. He said these hospitals have a three-week waiting list for surgical-medical beds.

"We're not here to preserve any system of hospitals. We're here to preserve the right to patients of choice, to preserve high quality hospitals and to provide a reasonable number of physicians in reasonable areas," said Dr. Horsch.

He added that if hospitals in western Wayne County were forced to close beds, patients would be required to go to the more expensive Wayne County General, University of Michigan or Detroit Medical Center hospitals.

"We need a balanced system of com-

munity and referral hospitals," Dr. Horsch continued. "We don't quarrel with the intent of the plan. If beds are empty, let's get rid of them."

Expressing frustration with the debedding plan was Richard Sobota, president of the hospital association and associate administrator of Saratoga Hospital. Sobota said that some empty beds must be kept available in case of emergencies and that the CHPC "presumes" that there are people who don't belong in hospitals.

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Skyrocketing gas prices cause drivers to cut back on motoring

By MARY GNIEWEK

A random survey shows that motorists in the Farmington area are using greater discretion about unnecessary car travel because of soaring gasoline prices.

The informal poll conducted last week at the Crowley's shopping center, Twelve Mile and Farmington roads, revealed more than a dozen shoppers were accomplishing several errands on one run.

"In our neighborhood we share shopping trips," said Margaret Cepelca of Farmington Hills. "If someone needs milk or bread and another neighbor is going out, they pick it up."

Mrs. Cepelca also limits gas consumption by carpooling and limiting use of the family car by her teenage son.

"My parents won't let me take the car if I'm just going to drive around," said Dave Platenik, a student at North Farmington High School.

"I only make a certain amount of money a week, and when I go out, I have to put gas in the car."

"WE TRY TO be more careful when we drive," said Marian Iafate of West Bloomfield.

"My husband is a cement contractor. He used to estimate jobs as the calls came in. That could cost as much as \$10 a trip. You hate to add that to the customer's bill."

"Now we log the calls and put them in order of distance. He goes out accordingly. It makes a big difference."

Better gas mileage caused Charles McGregor, a Farmington Hills city inspector, to switch cars.

"I have a Pontiac but I've gone back to using my old Volkswagen again," he said. "It helps out."

Some people can't afford to do less driving.

"I don't do much driving; to work a half mile from home and to run errands on my day off," said Barbara Crouse of Farmington Hills. "I can't afford to drive less."

Others plan to fly instead of drive.

"We drove to California a couple of years ago foreseeing the gas situation," said Carol Berner of Farmington Hills.



BARBARA KRAUSE



MITCH KAHN

"Now on vacation we go by plane. Also I've curtailed my driving as much as possible and I work close to home."

"I'm trying to tell my kids to take a bus instead of the car and I watch the amount of gas we use, that sort of thing," said Ann Mulcahy of West Bloomfield.

"The situation is worse in California. They have odd-even gas rationing," reported Mitch Kahn, recently discharged from military service.

"It costs me \$5 for less than a quarter tank," said Kahn, who lives in Southfield and works at the Twelve Mile shopping center.

"I can't afford to go out much. If cable TV was available, I'd buy it. It would be cheaper than going out."

"I DON'T MAKE unnecessary trips," said Beverly Baughn of Farmington Hills. "On vacation this year, we're going to travel by plane."

One portly businessman swears he's cut out driving completely.

"Let her do all the driving," he said, pointing to a female companion.

The Farmington area's biggest fuel

responsibility of ensuring government allocations are not overstepped.

So far he's been winning the fight with barely enough fuel to spare to chug an empty school bus up the steep hill at Raphael and Shiawassee.

"We've used all that's been allocated," Prisk said. "We're trying to live with those figures and we're staying close to it."

September through February the three-city district used 150,000 gallons of fuel to transport students. Monthly allocations ranged from 16,800 in September (the district used 16,500) to 18,001 in January (the district used 18,000).

Field trips were cancelled to cut down driving.

The Farmington Hills Department of Public Services consumed a mere 23,395 gallons of fuel this mild winter to plow the 25.5 inches of snowfall (10 inches less than last year at this time).

Prices for diesel fuel, used in most of the 40-vehicle fleet, jumped from 59.5 cents a gallon to 91.6 cents in the past year.

consumers are also towing the line. Farmington Public Schools Finance Director William Prisk has the monthly

Seek cheaper ride? Here are some hints

There are several public transportation services offered to Farmington and Farmington Hills residents.

Both cities jointly fund a taxi service available to residents 60 years and older. For 50 cents, a taxi will take a Farmington resident anywhere within the city, also to Boisford General Hospital and The Gathering Place at Mercy Center.

Farmington Hills senior residents pay \$1 for travel anywhere within both cities, except 50 cents to the Gathering Place, a senior activities center.

The service runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call 476-3300 or 474-3333 for service.

The Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMATA) runs several bus lines through both cities.

Buses leave from the Northland shopping center in Southfield to Oakland Community College (OCC), Twelve Mile and Orchard Lake, at 8:35, 9:00, and 10:25 in the morning and 3:40 in the afternoon. Lines re-

turn to Northland at 10:57 a.m. and 4:20 p.m.

Starting at 4 p.m. daily, several buses leave the Renaissance Center in downtown Detroit to OCC's Farmington Hills center. Another line runs from the Renaissance Center down the Jeffries Freeway to Middlebelt, north to Seven Mile, west to Farmington Road and culminates at Grand River. Service from downtown costs \$1.50 each way.

SEMATA's Oakland County Advanced Reservation Transit (OART) provides small bus transportation on a reservation basis. Six days advance reservation is required. Fares depend on the number of zones the commuter travels through, but vary from 40 cents to \$1.50, with half price for senior citizens and the handicapped.

That service is still waiting for 50 buses before it's totally implemented, hopefully this summer, but it is currently available for handicapped persons. Call 348-9220 for information.



A familiar scene

Yes, it's that time of year again when the line at the Secretary of State's office gets longer and longer as the time grows shorter and shorter to get to license tabs for the car. Drive down Grand River in Farmington and you'll see this scene today, the last day to buy 1980 tabs. (Staff photo)

Brotherton hits social welfare

State Representative Sandy Brotherton, R-Farmington, has called on the state legislature to "put the brakes on social services."

Brotherton was responding to the increase in the number of persons applying for welfare benefits. The Department of Social Services is facing cost overruns of \$150 million for the current fiscal year and another \$300 million for 1980-1981.

DSS officials have estimated that the average monthly caseload for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (ADC) will soar to 212,000 — 8,000 more than is provided for in the budget. The average caseload in the 1980-1981 fiscal year is estimated at 218,000. Governor William Milliken recommended a budget based on a caseload of 208,000.

General assistance, Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income programs are also experiencing rapid growth.

State officials are concerned that the Carter Administration will eliminate the revenue sharing program in an attempt to balance the federal budget, and that move could cost Michigan \$98 million in federal funds next year.

House Republican Leader William R. Bryant urged the Democrat majority in the House and Senate and the governor to enact some reforms, to look at way to cut costs, including benefits.

"At a time when we are asking our schools to meet 20 percent inflation with a 1.8 percent increase in state aid, when our corrections facilities are overflowing with prisoners for whom we can't even provide adequate beds, we have to put the brakes on social services," Brotherton said.

"REPUBLICANS IN the house will continue their efforts to streamline the welfare system by eliminating those least in need: people who have already moved out of state, who have jobs but are on strike and who have quit jobs voluntarily.

"These reforms would certainly help, but they may not be enough. We may well have to cut into the heart of the program — the level of benefits," Brotherton added.

Brotherton suggested taking steps to find those who can work and exercise more pressure on them to go back to work.

"We can't do anything about the children, the elderly or sick, but those healthy should be forced back into the work force," he said.

The house just passed a bill that would shorten the length of time a person could collect welfare while out of the state to one month.

Sponsored by State Representative Gary Randall, R-Mt. Pleasant, the bill is now in the Senate committee on health and social services.

DSS Director John T. Dempsey charged that the legislature last year underfunded the social services program in Michigan by cutting \$100 million from the DSS budget last summer.

"So the major part of our current problem stems from that general decision.

MIGRATION TO MICHIGAN from other states for the purpose of collecting higher welfare benefits is the exception rather than the rule, he said.

The DSS returned about \$300 million to the state between 1976 and 1979 "largely as a result of the healthy economy as well as through effective administration."

The recent decline in Michigan's economy, linked to the auto industry slump, has contributed significantly to the increase in welfare caseloads, Dempsey said.

In February 1980 unemployment figures in Michigan exceeded 11.2 percent, with more than 480,000 job-seekers unemployed," he said.



A prize winner

No, this isn't a photograph. This is a painting done by a Farmington Hills artist. The effort, titled "Chrome," has brought him national acclaim. To read more, turn to Page 3A.

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COMING ALIVE

Spring is here and just about everyone is itching to get out and do something. If you happen by the Farmington libraries, you may find a number of activities to your liking. To see what they have to offer in April, turn to Page 2A.