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Nursing home claim disputed

Medicare spat snags patients

By LYNN ORR

A Medicare flap has embroiled more than 50 current and former patients of the Farmington Nursing Home in a \$254,000 dispute involving overpayment for health services.

At least 19 patients have received notice from the Travelers Insurance Co., Medicare's agent, that they could be billed for services rendered at least six years ago.

Another 39 patients will receive similar letters in the weeks ahead, according to Russell DeLonjay, manager of the Medicare division in Travelers' Southfield office.

Meanwhile Joseph Mash, executive director of the Farmington Hills facility, participated in a three-man administrative hearing Tuesday in hopes of settling the dispute. A decision is not expected for several weeks.

The long-standing dispute involves overpayments for health services rendered from 1970-72, according to DeLonjay. Audits made shortly thereafter determined that overpayments were made to the facility because some of the services were not covered by Medicare.

MEDICARE payments can be made only when a patient is in a special section for Medicare patients, DeLonjay says. But the nursing home and the insurance company have been wrangling about the interpretation of the law for several years.

"The interpretation of the law by Travelers and HEW (the federal department of Health, Education and Welfare) has placed us and some of our patients in an untenable position," Mash contends.

"Some of their cost adjustments and denials are without reasonable grounds."

Although Mash has promised that patients will not be billed, the relatives of patients are asking why health care rendered six years ago is questioned now.

The 96-year-old grandmother of Mrs. Betty Kitchen of Walled Lake is currently a patient in the Farmington Nursing Home. She received notice from the insurance company one week ago. Nearly one month of health care is now being questioned, Mrs. Kitchen says.

"Why are we hearing about this now?" she asked. "I don't know what will happen if the determination goes against the nursing home. There's no way we would be able to pay for this."

MASH is convinced the patients won't be billed.

"He'll take the case to court if necessary," he says.

"This has been a long drawn-out process of letter writing and review, and we're finally coming to the appeal mechanism."

He predicts that the hearing board, headed by Travelers employee Bernard Felton, will go against him. Court action is the next step, he says, and he believes the law is on his side, as well as the patients.

"The statute of limitations, I feel, will hold for the patients. There's a law on the books which protects the consumer. Neither the provider of service (the nursing home) nor the third party payer (Medicare) can make claims against those patients."

DeLonjay isn't so sure. "I wanted to send these letters out, but they had to be put on notice as to what their rights are," he says.

Mrs. Kitchen says when she talked to DeLonjay, he "just wanted to get me off the phone."

Mash is angry that he wasn't notified that the patients would receive letters.

"To notify patients that I may bill them six or seven years after the fact is, as far as I'm concerned, trying to make me a party to their idocy. Notice at this late date is nothing but harassment, plus the fact that the case hasn't been decided."

'I don't know what will happen if the determination goes against the nursing home. There's no way we would be able to pay for this.'

—Betty Kitchen

DeLonjay says the patients have a right to ask for a redetermination, but that it must be requested within 60 days of receipt of his notification letter. The letter specifies that any billing is between the patient and the Farmington Nursing Home, and that future insurance coverage is not in jeopardy.

Mash is highly critical of Travelers' handling of the situation and the Medicare program as a whole.

"As the fiscal intermediary for Medicare, they're paid for the service, and it's quite lucrative for them. And the public is being promised an insurance program that, in all truth, they're not getting."

Hills eyes bond sale for housing

In an attempt to avoid federal or state regulation, the Farmington Hills City Council is studying the possibility of financing its own senior citizen housing complex.

The council, at this week's session, voted to refer to the housing and building commissions the feasibility of selling bonds to build a senior housing complex on 12 acres at Freedom and Drake.

Making the motion was Councilman Earl Oppert, who has been an advocate of senior housing.

The land in question, with an estimated assessment of \$350,000, is being donated by a local businessman.

Supporting a city-financed senior citizen housing project were Councilwoman Joanne Smith, who seconded Oppert's motion, and Councilman Joe Alkateeb.

Alkateeb, who campaigned against special zoning for senior housing, supported the motion, saying self-financing was the best way to provide housing for Farmington Hills' elderly.

This proposal is the second in two weeks to come before the council. The other is a proposal to build a senior citizen complex on Orchard Lake south of Thirteen Mile.

WHILE Alkateeb supported this week's proposal, he opposed the Orchard Lake development because it would fall under the RCE-1 zoning designation which allows for a 60-foot structure. Also voting against the Orchard Lake site was Councilwoman Joanne Soronen.

Although Alkateeb and Oppert favor a study on the Freedom Road site, they differ as to what kind of structure should be built. Alkateeb hopes the site development will prove that low-rise senior housing is economically feasible.

Oppert hopes to avoid state and federal regulations which come along with their funding—low-income housing and minority quotas.

"By selling bonds we could pass on the savings to those renting in the complex," said Oppert. "We would be in the position to give rental priority to our own residents."

Oppert cited Lincoln Park which rents to seniors for \$125 a month as an example of what Farmington Hills could do. By selling bonds, the Hills could garner lower interest rates than by going through the banks. The difference could be between a six per cent and nine per cent mortgage.



Best effort

That's what North Farmington's Tim Mather (15) put forward against Detroit's Comet Greg Williams (15) at this week's game, which advanced the Raiders to the state finals in the 86-69 win. Looking on is North's Mike Howley (24). To read more about the game, turn to the sports section. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Civil rights decline bogs black history studies

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

There's more to black history than George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington.

But the movement to uncover the role of blacks in America has lost "quite a bit of momentum," according to Curtis Anderson, history instructor at Farmington Hills' Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus and at Cranbrook, West Bloomfield.

Along with a growing disinterest in black history there is a trend toward neglecting the rights of minorities, said Anderson.

"Interest in minorities have waned since 1972. When OCC instituted its black history course in 1968, five sections were filled. This semester, 30 students are studying black history."

Curtis enumerated several reasons for the disinterest in black history.

A belief that black history is for black students figures in the decline of the course on the Farmington Hills campus.

"One of the things that is important to this trend is the tendency toward taking classes that are job oriented. I will take courses I-10 to get job A. I become a very good job A'er but I don't know anything about daily society," Anderson said.

That structured approach to learning leads people to believe that black history is irrelevant for white students.

"Black history is for white students. American history is not complete until there is an understanding of how blacks and whites intertwined," said Anderson.

In addition to the need to teach black history, Anderson wishes minorities could also have a place in a balanced telling of the American past.

"It's difficult to integrate history because of the way it's set up," Anderson said.

"In the 1960s black studies were pressed upon professors who were forced to change. Many recited," said Anderson.



CURTIS ANDERSON

THE STRUCTURE of many history courses still deals with trends in white settlement. What's needed, Anderson says, is a telling of history in which the black man is neither a hero nor a bad guy.

But interest in history which incorporates different aspects of America is declining as the civil rights movement slips into the public unconscious.

"Nixon rode in on a conservative reaction to the '60s. He instituted a program of benign neglect. In effect, he said, 'We know you're out there black folk, but we're going to ignore you.'"

"This was so incoherent into the fabric of society that the protections which were weaved in it slowly unraveled," he said.

Such actions as the Bakke case and the recent ruling against the City of Detroit's affirmative action program are examples of interest in minority rights slowly dimming, said Anderson.

"One wonders if we'll stop in time. Historically, the Founding Fathers have compromised on the issue of equality," Anderson said.

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Gloomy budget faces district

By LYNN ORR

Farmington Board of Education got its first peek at next year's \$28.5 million budget, \$500,000 of which may be destined for the cutting room floor.

A projected 11 per cent increase in local taxes and State Equalized Value (SEV) fails to offset decreases in state aid and increases in salaries and inflation, says William Prisk, assistant superintendent of finance.

To balance the budget, administration is recommending across-the-board cuts, rather than elimination of specific programs.

"It was the consensus that we try to maintain basic programs and make cuts of a peripheral nature," Supt. Lewis Schulman told the board Monday night.

Schulman emphasized that the 1978-79 budget presented already reflects substantial cuts. Eliminated will be about 33 teachers and support staff, three administrative positions and some funds for improvements.

Before adoption of the tentative budget at the March 21 board meeting, members will be considering further cuts as recommended by administration.

Recommended cuts include: \$75,000 more in capital improvements; one elementary teacher (\$19,000); two reading specialist (\$44,100); a psychologist, social worker and speech correctionist (\$20,000); a vocal music consultant (\$21,000); an elementary

librarian (\$23,426); an administrative assistant (\$20,350); three senior high secretaries (\$31,500); two maintenance workers (\$25,000); and \$150,000 in the custodial budget.

An additional \$25,000 in the athletic budget; \$35,000 in maintenance supplies; and non-replacement of an administrative position round out the items which the board may axe.

Although the cuts are considered "crucial," Schulman said administration hopes to maintain the current student-teacher ratio, about 26-1 at the elementary level.

Board members saw few opportunities to make additional cuts, other than those recommended by the administration.

Trustee Michael Spiece suggested that some expansion of the special education program should be curtailed because of restrictions on other programs.

Special Education Director Graham Lewis argued that any expansions were funded by state aid and most were mandated by state or federal law.

"I support special education, but I guess I look at a 38 per cent increase and I see something wrong," Spiece said.

Treasurer Richard Wallace suggested that it might be time to consider

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