



**Sheldon Wasserman
State Representative**

July 16, 2004

**WASSERMAN REQUESTS AUDIT
OF PHYSICIAN OFFICE VISIT DATA PROGRAM**

MADISON—State Representative Sheldon Wasserman (D-Milwaukee) submitted a request to the Joint Committee on Audit co-chairs this afternoon, in which he asked for an audit of the Bureau of Health Information (BHI) with a particular focus on the Physician Office Visit Data (POVD) program.

BHI tracks, gathers and produces reports on various health statistics, vital records and other health care information relative to Wisconsin citizens and the state's providers of health care. Six years ago the legislature passed a bill to expand Wisconsin's data collection efforts to include information on physician office visits. BHI was designated to implement POVD collection, which is funded by program revenue (a tax on physicians). And more recently via the 2003-2004 budget bill, a private entity, the Wisconsin Hospital Association, was charged with collecting and reporting information on hospital and ambulatory and surgery data.

“Six years and over five million dollars later, the POVD program has yet to release any data. Before the Legislature entertains any new government-run health care data programs, there are many questions that must be answered about POVD,” said Wasserman, who is the Legislature's only physician and ranking member of the Assembly Committees on Health and Public Health.

In his letter to Senator Carol Roessler and Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz, (attached) Wasserman listed these questions, asking in part:

- How is the PR funding being spent and why are so many FTEs required to run the program? Has BHI funded other programs with POVD money and how did it spend money from the hospital data program?
- The Wisconsin Hospital Association's similar data collection effort is up and running after less than a year, with fewer employees. What other private sector initiatives and additional government regulations have come along that are in effect duplicating what BHI does?
- When the data is finally released, how can it be used given the privacy statutes?
- Advocates have consistently argued they want to be able to measure quality from POV data. How have the current methodology and expenses achieved those goals?

(more)



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- What questions is the program attempting to answer for consumers? How are the data translated into useful information in order to help physicians improve?

“The bottom line is, the program has been a waste of time and money and the data, when it is finally released, will not be useful to consumers of health care,” said Wasserman. “Medical patients clearly should have access to reliable information about the costs of health care and the quality of their physicians. Unfortunately, true cost estimates and measures of performance are impossible to determine from the data that is currently being collected.”

Wasserman continued, “I have been a public critic of the POV D program since its inception. In my opinion it has clearly not lived up to expectations. I believe the program should be discontinued and any unused PR funds put into the general fund. At the very least it and BHI should be subjected to an independent audit.”

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