

Hospital billing guide reviewed

Wisconsin, like the nation, continues to deal with the problem of the uninsured. As policy makers debate the fiscal and social issues presented by our health care financing systems, Wisconsin's community hospitals have stepped up to the plate to make sure that fear of a hospital bill does not prevent someone from seeking necessary care.

Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen deserves special kudos for working with Wisconsin hospitals on this important issue, demonstrating his focus on accomplishments through collaboration rather than confrontation.

As reported earlier this week, the Wisconsin Hospital Association reached an agreement with the attorney general on meaningful and progressive hospital billing and collection guidelines. These comprehensive but flexible guidelines underscore the commitment of Wisconsin's community hospitals to treat patients with care and concern from bedside to billing office.

Van Hollen asked for, and received, assurance that Wisconsin hospitals are reviewing their policies and practices on charges, charity care, billing and debt collection.

Hospitals are being asked to sign a "confirmation of commitment" that their billing and collection policies meet or exceed the principles set down in the WHA Billing and Collection guidelines. To date all Madison area hospitals and many others in the state have made this commitment.

Of course, Wisconsin health care providers need to obtain fair payment from patients who are able to pay, and the debate about health care financing will continue. As health reform discussions continue, know that Wisconsin hospitals will always be an important safety net in our communities.

— *Steve Brenton, Wisconsin
Hospital Association*