

President's Column: Wisconsin Hospitals Committed to Affordable, Quality Care

By Eric Borgerding, WHA President and CEO

A recent guest column ("[Wisconsin's nonprofit hospitals prioritize profits over patients](#)," Oct. 19) made several unfounded claims that paint a grossly inaccurate and false picture of Wisconsin's hospitals.

With no indication the author has ever stepped foot in Wisconsin or has any experience with our state's acclaimed health care system, she questioned our hospitals' priorities of putting patients first. If this assertion were based on factual evidence and not a political agenda, it begs the question why the author placed nearly the exact same, cookie-cutter column in several [other states](#) with only the data points changed.

As for the claims and conclusions within the column, they are based on discredited studies, the authors of which willingly admit are significantly limited. For example, the authors of the RAND Corp. report, which is based on very limited, up to nine-year-old Wisconsin data, warn against using the study for comparative purposes given its lack of control for key variables and numerous factors that influence health care costs.

Despite these questionable studies and attacks from out-of-state think tanks and interest groups that sprout up seemingly daily, Wisconsin hospitals and health systems continue to operate around the clock, providing nationally recognized, high-quality, life-saving care to all patients. Indeed, Wisconsin has many reasons to be proud of our hospitals and the excellent care their dedicated teams provide.

Looking at more recent findings, in July, Wisconsin ranked [fourth](#) in the country for five-star-rated hospitals by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). According to CMS, the quality of our state's health care far surpasses that of the national average and is tops in the Midwest. Additionally, the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality ranked Wisconsin in the [top quartile](#) of states for quality health care in its 2022 report.

When it comes to rural hospitals, we are fortunate again to have some of the best in the nation. Since 2015, Wisconsin's rural hospitals have consistently ranked in the top 10 and were ranked [second best](#) in the U.S. in 2022 by the Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Program. This achievement underscores their dedication to providing quality health care services, especially in underserved areas and the communities most in need.

To address cost, all elements of the health care and insurance system must do their part, and Wisconsin's hospitals are working hard to keep care affordable and accessible. According to a November 2022 report by *Forbes*, Wisconsin has the [eighth lowest](#) cost of care in the nation. Wisconsin also has the [seventh lowest](#) rate of patients who are deterred from seeking care due to cost, according to the United Health Foundation's America's Health Rankings report from exactly one year ago.

The Wisconsin Technology Council's "Taking the Pulse" report from February of this year also backs up these findings and further demonstrates Wisconsin's [low readmission rates and lengths of stay](#) — some of the best in the Midwest.

The health care landscape is complex, and studies and editorials focusing on one narrow aspect of the system often produce false,



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skewed and even misleading conclusions. What many of these error-ridden analyses ignore is that stable finances are absolutely critical for 24/7/365 hospitals that care for all who come through their doors.

Wisconsin's hospitals work very hard to be good stewards of finances and resources while delivering top-notch care and upholding their community-focused missions. In fact, 96% of Wisconsin's general hospitals are nonprofit, providing billions of dollars in community benefits and charitable care. Last year alone, Wisconsin hospitals provided \$2.1 billion worth of services at no cost to patients or taxpayers.

Wisconsin hospitals' firm commitment to high-quality, affordable, and accessible health care is not mere rhetoric; it is substantiated by numerous recognitions they receive every year from highly credible sources. While it is not accolades they seek, these rankings are fitting reflections of Wisconsin hospitals' dedication to delivering outstanding health care and putting patients first.

Wisconsin hospitals are proud to provide some of the best care in the country. Let there be no doubt: Our hospitals and their dedicated teams will continue doing their part to make high-quality health care affordable and accessible to all.

This column was published in The Cap Times on Oct. 26, 2023. See the article [here](#).

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