

HealthSpring seeks contract with BCNH

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By Clint Confehr

Bedford County Nursing Home is one of three facilities in Tennessee approached by a company that hopes to succeed Medicare as the health care underwriter for residents at the home, officials have explained.

Wayne Schumann, administrator of the county-owned medical residence on Union Street, advised the nursing home's trustees late last week that recently he'd been approached by a representative of HealthSpring.

The two other nursing homes in Tennessee that were approached by the managed care agency are in Nashville, Schumann and BCNH Marketing Director Susan McGee said.

As federal funding for health care increasingly has private management groups provide services, this proposal is being considered by Bedford County officials as something that may be selected by residents of the nursing home.

Advantages noted by Schumann include the addition of a nurse practitioner who would be working at the nursing home to provide direct medical attention in ways that are to avoid hospitalization of the residents.

Another advantage is implied by that step. A reduction in the transfers of residents from the nursing home to a hospital will reduce stress on residents -- lowering the chance of disorientation and other circumstances that may arise from new quarters, Schumann said.

Still another advantage for the county-owned facility is financial; a \$300 per month payment for each resident who decides to allow HealthSpring become the underwriter for payment of bills incurred when a resident's level of health care increases, Schumann and McGee said.

They provided an example of the chain of events to illustrate how such health care insurance could change.

Patients requiring skilled care are admitted to the nursing home for recovery and, along their way to full recovery, the intensity of required medical attention should decline so they can be considered an intermediate care patient.

In this scenario, the patient might, for example, require intravenous delivery of medication. A nurse practitioner can provide that level of care and if pneumonia sets in, the nurse practitioner is capable of continuing the nursing home resident's care and thereby avoid hospitalization of the individual.

When the individual recovers and the level of care drops, HealthSpring could enroll the resident and provide the insurance coverage which would then no longer be from Medicare. HealthSpring's purpose would then be to closely monitor the resident's health and take preventive steps so they're less likely to need the more expensive skilled care and draw on the company's insurance reserves.

"If you can manage to avoid hospitalization, the savings is large," Schumann said.

Bedford County Nursing Home has approximately 100 residents. Given the scenario outlined by Schumann and McGee, at least a fifth of the residents and their close relatives might be approached by a representative of HealthSpring if permitted by the nursing home's trustees.

The Bedford County Nursing Home Board of Trustees is perhaps better known as the committee of county commissioners that oversees management of the county-owned nursing home.

HealthSpring's representatives aren't to "rush in" and deliver a sales pitch, McGee said.

If HealthSpring's proposal is accepted, then at all times, the nurse practitioner would be under the direct supervision of Dr. Howard Rupard, the nursing home's physician, Schumann said.

The nursing home administrator anticipated another meeting with a HealthSpring representative on Friday when he is to obtain additional information and be prepared for a more detailed presentation when the nursing home's trustees meet again.

During the trustees meeting, Schumann reported Dr. Rupard is providing a nurse practitioner at the nursing home.

Also Thursday, Schumann reported officials with Community Health Systems are developing a plan on how the Bedford County Medical Center hospital building is to be shut down when the new owners of the business transfer operations to the new building on U.S. 231 north of town.

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