

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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One of Wisconsin Badger Care's Dirty Little Secrets

Does anybody know why the Wisconsin Department of Corrections does not seem to care how much it costs to provide medical attention for elderly and ailing prisoners? After all, there are provisions for compassionate release for those who are over 60 and have been in prison over 10 years, and for those who are terminally ill. Yet the DOC is oblivious to how much it costs to provide medical attention for these guys.

A guy who lives in the same 100-man pod in Stanley that I live in, was recently taken to a hospital and admitted for several days. He has a severe kidney infection which will require surgery to remove the diseased part of his kidney. It will cost tens of thousands of dollars for all his medical care.

A couple of weeks after he made an emergency trip to the hospital, he received a letter informing him that the DOC was applying for Badger care on his behalf to pay for all the costs associated with the time he spent as an inpatient at the hospital. The claimed authorization for this is sec. 49.84, Wis. Stats. I looked up the statute and it says nothing about covering medical expenses for adult male prisoners. All it states is that the warden may apply for Badger Care on a prisoner's behalf - but in the context of providing health care for the prisoner's children (I urge all of you to read it for yourself and draw your own conclusions).

Did Gov. Walker really sign legislation which made all residents of Wisconsin who earn below the poverty level eligible for Badger Care - including prisoners? It really doesn't matter to taxpayers or prisoners which part of the state budget is used to pay for prisoners' health care costs - except for one thing.

This hitherto secret billing arrangement is shifting hundreds of thousands - perhaps millions - of dollars from health care for free citizens to the cost of housing prisoners. It results in understating the amount of money it costs to house prisoners and creates a disincentive for the DOC to release elderly and infirm prisoners. Further, money that Gov. Walker is claiming goes towards health care for poor citizens is being used - dishonestly, I think - to subsidize the bloated DOC. I urge all citizens to speak out and put a stop to this disingenuous shell game which is misleading the public.