



Virginia MIRC <vamirc@mirc.virginia.gov>

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## New MIRC Comment

1 message

[Redacted]

Wed, Oct 9, 2013 at 1:20 PM

Reply-To: [Redacted]  
To: vamirc@mirc.virginia.gov

**First Name** - Maria

**Last Name** - Dennis

**Organization Name** - self

**Comment** -

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Respectfully submitted to the members of the Senate of Virginia and the Virginia House of Delegates,

I wish to express my concerns regarding the proposed expansion of Medicaid in Virginia. I have worked in human services since 1982, and much of my work involved working within agencies funded by Medicaid. I believe that Medicaid has been a useful and a necessary safety net for the most vulnerable individuals in our society. I am, however, seriously concerned about the exploitation of Medicaid which I have seen more recently. While I would not assume the authority to accuse anyone of "fraud", I will be so bold as to say that there is extreme waste occurring within the present system, because it cannot possibly be monitored closely enough.

I feel confident that my work with individuals receiving mental health support services made a positive contribution to their well-being. However, I saw waste occurring in terms of the fact that Medicaid paid \$90.00 for an hour of my service when a client preferred me to drive her to her appointment, rather than using a Medicaid taxi. This client saw her physician or counselor alone, while I sat in the waiting room or visited another client. This client did not like the Medicaid taxi service. The Medicaid taxi service is free to Medicaid recipients, and they have used these services effectively for many years now. To whom is this waste profitable? This waste is profitable to agencies that contract to provide Mental Health Support Services to Virginians, who will document these taxi services as a "therapeutic encounter." Another instance of waste: A part-time contract employee uses his lunch hour to take a client to McDonald's for lunch. That results in a \$90.00 payment from Medicaid to the agency for what is questionably "therapeutic." One agency employee spent fifteen to twenty minutes with a client, resulting in billing for an hour (\$90.00 in Medicaid reimbursement to the agency). This client wrote down all of the start and end times of her "therapeutic contacts" in her planner/calendar, and expressed her concerns to me. This happened on a regular basis, and was not discouraged by the agency.

I am glad that Medicaid offers a safety net to provide services which are necessary for the most vulnerable and needy in Virginia. I am also grateful for the clinics in my area which are staffed by dedicated physicians such as Dr. Greg Albers and Dr. Thomas Eppes, who donate their time to local Free Clinics in Lynchburg. They have been a God-send to so many in central Virginia. Lynchburg and Amherst County also have two Johnson Health Center clinics, which provide medical care on a sliding scale fee. I believe that a better investment in health care for Virginians would be expanding the accessibility of rural and urban health clinics and free clinics, funded by grants and tax dollars. Some argue that expanding Medicaid will increase the number of jobs in Virginia. I suggest that building local clinics throughout Virginia will create an even greater number of jobs, and many more jobs will be available to individuals who are living in economically struggling areas of Virginia. This effort would not require the expansion of Medicaid. In addition, Virginia can begin to educate Medicaid consumers about the purpose of hospital emergency departments, and perhaps consumers will be less likely to use the hospital for non-life-threatening medical concerns which lead to outrageous billing for care and longer waiting times for everyone.

Finally, I want to say that Medicaid is an inequitable system. People, who have worked all of their lives and have greater need of medical care later in life, may not qualify for that assistance due to marginally exceeding some income level cut-off. I saw this when working as a nursing home social worker, as well as with elderly individuals living in the community. Many of our elders, whose sweat built the America we enjoy today, are living retirement check to check and often having to choose between buying their medicine and paying for heating fuel or other necessities.

Medicaid is flawed, and this system encourages people not to pursue gainful employment. Motivated workers who pay taxes are necessary to maintain these safety net programs for the truly needy in our communities. Programs which, in the long-term, discourage younger people from realizing their God-given potential and utilizing their skills and abilities in the world of work are a huge mistake. Having worked so much with people who have settled for a subsistence lifestyle, I know that too much of "a good thing" can be a bad thing. Please do not expand Medicaid in Virginia.