



HealthWatch Wisconsin

REPORTER

October 5, 2010

Analysis of Complex Healthcare Coverage Issues in Wisconsin!

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ABC for Health in partnership with HealthWatch Wisconsin, a membership organization that focuses work on maximizing access to care and coverage for the people of Wisconsin, has developed a new feature: "**The HealthWatch Wisconsin Reporter**" to highlight large scale and important health care coverage issues that require deeper analysis and review. This new publication tackles big issues, providing in-depth analysis and insight into complex questions.

Registration is Now Open:

Health Reform Training!

"The Changing Landscape of Health Insurance in Wisconsin after Health Reform"

Thursday, October 28, 2010
9:00am-4:30pm

Inn on the Park, 22 S. Carroll St.,
Madison

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Special Comment: Bobby Peterson Thinks About What Might Have Been...

You are receiving this Special Edition Newsletter as a benefit of being a subscriber to the HealthWatch Wisconsin Update Newsletter! Thank you!

The Right Way and the Wrong Way: How the Medical Schools SHOULD have Responded to the WUHF Board and LAB Report

Over the last few months, I've thought a lot about the Legislative Audit Bureau Report and the reaction from our State's two medical schools. I wondered how things could have transpired. When presented with recommendations to improve the stewardship of the Blue Cross Blue Shield conversion funds, it doesn't take hindsight to realize that a more appropriate response from the medical schools--one that should have happened from the very beginning--could have changed the tone of the debate and moved our state forward on a path to a stronger relationship between medical education research and the public health community.

Were I in the position of the medical schools, I would have replied as follows, in the form of a letter to the Legislative Audit Bureau Report.

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau,

Thank you for the comprehensive report and analysis that you conducted of the five year medical education and public health grants developed by our schools. We recognize the tremendous amount of work, analysis, and review that went into this comprehensive and detailed report. We do not necessarily agree with all of the findings of the report, but we acknowledge that changes to the oversight, review, and funding allocation process are in order to do what is right and best for the people of Wisconsin, and to affirm the important leadership role of our state's medical schools. Both of our schools recognize that the health challenges faced by the people of our state greatly exceed the resources available to meet them. However, we also recognize our stewardship responsibility and our duty related to these funds to work hard to promote the health of the people of Wisconsin.

We remind you that both our institutions have a strong emphasize on research and are largely funded by research grants. We have many teams of highly skilled researchers who have improved health in our state, nation, and world in many ways,



TODAY!

Health care reform is unfolding before our eyes. The process of reform will take years, but many key questions and issues need your attention today! This workshop will continue the process of educating the public health workforce on health reform issues. Join sponsors HealthWatch Wisconsin and ABC for Health for sessions led by regulators, policy makers, and advocates in Wisconsin. Included in your registration is HealthWatch Wisconsin's newest publication: "My Health Reform Guidebook." Continuing education credits will be offered for attorneys and social workers. A continental breakfast, lunch and CD are included with your registration.

Reduced registration cost will be available for members of HealthWatch Wisconsin! Join HealthWatch Wisconsin to take advantage of savings throughout the year!

SPECIAL PRIZE DRAWING:
GREEN BAY PACKERS DELUXE,
INDOOR CLUB SEAT TICKETS!!
One lucky winner will leave the workshop on October 28 with a pair of tickets to the December 5 Green Bay Packers v. San Francisco 49ers Game!! To be eligible to win: you must be a 2010- 2011 individual member of HealthWatch Wisconsin. We will include individuals joining HealthWatch WI while registering for this workshop in our drawing.

See you in Madison in October!

JOIN US...

...in uniting the Public Health Workforce through comprehensive education and advocacy

including stem cell research, Alzheimer's disease, and countless other programs and projects. We also recognize that our institutions do not always have the technical expertise or the sensitivity to provide services to the community or the public health workforce to address many of the state's population health issues. We have, however, made significant steps to improve our schools population health programs. The Medical College of Wisconsin is active in many communities across the state and these funds help extend the reach of our school's services. At the University of Wisconsin, we embrace the "Wisconsin Idea" to help translate University advancements and research results into community enhancements. But we both know we can and must do more.

In 2000, when Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Commissioner of Insurance designated the schools as stewards of these funds, both our schools opposed developing community grant programs. At that time, we made clear that we were not grant-making institutions. And we can see from some of our mistakes that we were right—we are not grant-making institutions and we have much to learn about the funding process. But we will move forward and learn from our errors in a tried and true research tactic—practice makes (more) perfect. We will get better and we ask for your patience. There have been bumps in the road—problems with conflicts of interests, problems in the distribution of funds, and problems in the leadership of our two schools to make certain that grant programs were developed, reviewed, and funded in the most appropriate ways. We are embarrassed by our errors, but we also recognize that this is a learning process. Our schools want to reach out to key stakeholders around the state, including the public health community and our state's hospitals, clinics, and advocacy organizations to help us further refine our process and procedures. We recognize that as top-flight research organizations, we do not necessarily have all of the skill sets and staff to work effectively in communities, and we must do better. Bridging the gap between researchers and applied public health practitioners will not happen overnight. We need to cultivate our relationships; we need to better understand public health issues within our state, at all levels of our organizations. And, we need to work effectively with community-based organizations to identify and address some of the significant problems facing people in Wisconsin. We must earn the trust of the people of Wisconsin. We intend to do so.

Our schools want to work with the people of Wisconsin to develop our programs and process that are exemplary. We do not want to fund redundant research; we do not want to provide services that are not needed in the state. Instead, we want to have a transparent, credible process that promotes confidence as it promotes the health of the people of Wisconsin. We understand the tension created by the split of 65% for medical education research and 35% to community public health grants. Commissioner Connie O'Connell created an order that tried, albeit ineffectively, to distinguish buckets of public health and research and education funding opportunities. The allocation of funds along strict lines of distribution is patently false. The fixation over the distribution of funds distracts many stakeholders from our primary purpose: to promote the health of the people of Wisconsin through research and public health practice. We hope that all understand the many shades of gray that run across our programs and it is incumbent upon us to do a better job of communicating how and why funding is distributed. We know we can better explain and prioritize community-based initiatives and medical research and education activities. We acknowledge that the medical researchers carry most of the political power at our institutions and we, as leaders, must ensure that community-based, applied public health activities grow and prosper at our schools. For too long, public health has received the "short end of the stick" and we know that some of the public resentment stems from this longstanding funding disparity.

We must also acknowledge our errors and failures to adequately ensure against conflicts of interest. We must assure the public that our schools will not use these limited health resources to fund medical school functions, medical school buildings, or other medical school activities. We have dollars from other sources for those

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ABC for Health, Inc. is a Wisconsin-based, nonprofit public interest law firm dedicated to linking children and families, particularly those with special health care needs, to health care benefits and services. ABC for Health's mission is to provide information, advocacy tools, legal services, and expert support needed to obtain, maintain, and finance health care coverage and services.

activities. Yes, these trusted funds belong to the people of Wisconsin. We owe them the highest level of stewardship. And we owe it to the people of our state to negotiate fiercely to reduce or eliminate and unwarranted management fees that erode and dilute the purpose of our funds. We promise to do better.

We are proud of our success in securing National Institute of Health grants, partly because we can leverage existing funds to secure additional grants. But in our thirst for NIH grants, we cannot supersede our primary mission for these funds to help the people of Wisconsin. Our schools must direct these scarce public funds to exemplary projects that improve the health of the people of Wisconsin. For example, we can do even more to help target funds to help reduce health disparities in Wisconsin. But we candidly recognize that we need to AND we will do more. We must ensure that the people of our state have appropriate access to both health care coverage and services. The new health reform law provides opportunities, but also portends great threats with its complexity and time-table for major changes in a delicate health care financing system. Consumer education, provider education, and promoting access to appropriate coverage and care must be a priority of our two schools and of our leadership.

We also recognize that as large institutions with combined budgets of over 1.4 billion dollars, many in the public health community are fearful of speaking up. But we need to hear the truth and the unvarnished issues before we can proceed with corrective steps and action. Therefore, in order to address these issues, we are calling for a summit to fully discuss and develop a time-table and plan to refine the process of grant-making by our two schools and reevaluate funding priorities in the medical education and research area. We want to include public health leadership, advocacy organizations, community-based organizations, and leadership at the medical schools so we can work together. We want to work with the people of Wisconsin, the Legislature, and other interested stakeholders to make the medical education research and public health grants something that we all can be proud of, and move Wisconsin forward to a better place for all.

Sincerely,
The Medical Schools of Wisconsin

Cc: Members of the Wisconsin United for Health Foundation; Insurance Commissioner Dilweg

But, unfortunately, the medical schools never wrote this letter. They never reached out to the public health community or the advocacy community. Instead, they circled the wagons and presented a defensive posture. Sadly, the medical schools lacked confidence, leadership, and vision, about their process, procedures, and how they will use these scarce resources. Sadly, this situation does not look like it will build trust or harmony between public health and the research community. ABC for Health will continue to watch, we will continue to fight, and we will continue to upset folks at the medical schools, not with malice but with a sense of purpose to do the right thing for the people of Wisconsin.

Bobby Peterson

The Legislative Audit Bureau Recommendations

The [Legislative Audit Bureau \(LAB\) Report](#) suggested in their May report that the medical schools periodically used the funds to **benefit their own institutions**, rather than the public's health. To view a summary of LAB key findings and recommendations, view the [PowerPoint presentation](#). As presented at the July



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If you know someone who might be interested, please [Forward this Newsletter >>](#)

15 WUHF Board meeting, the following are LAB Policy Considerations:

- **Amend Conflict of Interest Policies.**
- **Clarify "allowable uses" of medical education and research funds.**
- **Redefine the supplanting prohibition.**
- **Determine the degree to which medical education and research funds should be competitively allowed.**
- **Determine the level of public health funding the schools may directly expend.**

About WUHF:

- In 1999 Blue Cross & Blue Shield United of Wisconsin become a for profit stock corporation
- Conversion funds were split equally between the UW Medical School and the Medical College of Wisconsin.
- The Foundation's primary purpose is to realize the full value of Blue Cross/Blue Shield and to transfer the proceeds from the sale of the stock to the two medical schools.
- The Foundation also reviews and approves revised five-year plans, submitted by the two medical schools, to ensure compliance with the Insurance Commissioner's Order.

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