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Bad Medicine: Part II - 03/18/2008 6:04 PM

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**Bad Medicine: Part II**

Sioux Falls has earned itself a place in the national spotlight once again. But this time it has nothing to do with the quality of life or the percentage of working parents. Instead, the focus centers squarely on the squabble between Sanford Health and physician-owned hospitals, including the Avera Heart Hospital and the Sioux Falls Surgical Center.

You won't find Sioux Falls mentioned on the March 10th Forbes magazine cover. In fact, you won't even find any mention of the city in the article's first 10 paragraphs. Still what is said in the pages of a cover story entitled, "Bad Medicine" is certainly ruffling feathers here.

Sanford Health Vice President of Public Policy, Cindy Morrison says, "I think the reason it's been up on the radar screen is because Congress continues to look at this issue."

Morrison says the heart of the issue is whether it's a conflict of interest for doctors to own a share of the hospitals to which they admit patients. It's her job to lobby Congress to stop the practice.

Morrison continues, "When doctors can self-refer to facilities they own and profit each time they put a patient in that facility, that's a conflict and we believe that that's wrong."

Dr. Blake Curd a physician-owner of the Sioux Falls Surgical Center disagrees.

Curd, an orthopedic surgeon and physician-owner of the Sioux Falls Surgical Center, says, "When patients come to see me in the office, they're expecting me to do something and the expectation then is that I get reimbursed or paid for doing that."

He insists the issue boils down to simple dollars and cents, profits and loss.

Curd continues, "Change is uncomfortable to everybody. And it, quite frankly, invades in their traditional territory. It's a competitor."

The arguments aren't new. In fact they've been more than ten years in the making.

Morrison says, "There are a lot of peer-reviewed studies that show that financial incentives matter and that what happens when financial incentives are in there, behavior changes."

Curd says, "We're about trying to provide the best care possible for patients, that's physician-directed, and we don't have the ability to do that in the large systems."

What is new is the focus the Forbes article puts on the issue and on Sioux Falls' medical community.

Morrison says, "The concern is that you have over-utilization and that the potential for a patient being put at risk as a result of those financial incentives is very real."

Curd says, "I think competition is a good thing and the more providers you have providing a quality product, the better the service is for the consumer."

The Forbes article cites data by the quality review firm, Health Grades to support its view that physician-owned hospitals "often deliver services better, safer, and at a lower cost." Yet in this letter to hospital administrators, Health Grades says it does not agree "that specialty hospitals are outperforming full-service hospitals." Bottom line? The jury's still out.

Forbes "Bad Medicine"

Jaine Andrews

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