

# Care, Comfort and Hope

## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

### Charity Care

Fear of a bill should never prevent a patient from seeking care at a Wisconsin hospital. Wisconsin hospital charity care programs provided \$232 million to more than 700 patients each day in 2010. The stories that follow illustrate the deep commitment and continuing concern that hospitals have to their patients to ensure they receive the care they need regardless of their ability to pay.

#### ***Pregnant, unemployed and homeless***

Sarah learned the meaning of a true friend – someone who is there for you during hard times.

Sarah's friend, a hospital patient, met with a financial counselor at the Aurora West Allis Medical Center, asking for advice and to advocate for Sarah, a woman she befriended who was in severe distress. Sarah was homeless, pregnant and unemployed, with no resources to pay her living expenses. The hospital patient explained that she took Sarah in and that Sarah pays her back by house cleaning and helping out when she can.

The hospital patient then told the financial counselor that she was worried because Sarah had no prenatal care, was older and high risk, and had been having "a lot of pain in her stomach." The financial counselor's immediate reaction was to send Sarah to the Emergency Department. But Sarah, who was in the lobby waiting area, refused to do so because she did not have insurance and said she needed to wait until she had financial support.

The financial counselor helped Sarah submit an application to the Aurora Helping Hand financial assistance program and got temporary assistance for Sarah until a more permanent program such as BadgerCare could kick in. With that, Sarah was able to see a doctor within two days.

The friend and Sarah, now also a patient, returned to thank the financial counseling staff. One of the financial counselors said, "I was given a card that was beautiful and heartfelt. It was so touching, and it made me excited for the next patient to come along, so we can continue to help one another."

**Aurora West Allis Medical Center**

#### ***B-r-e-a-t-h-e***

Chronic obstruction airway disease (COAD) is a pair of commonly co-existing diseases of the lungs in which the airways become narrowed. This leads to a limitation of the flow of air both to and from the lungs, causing shortness of breath. It could be fatal if left untreated.

A 60-year-old female Green Bay resident came in the Emergency Department at the Aurora BayCare Medical Center for COAD. She was uninsured, unemployed and received Social Supplemental Income (SSI) for disability. She had recently lost her Medicaid coverage due to issues that can be characterized as "red tape."

The financial counselor met with the patient and provided her with the Aurora Helping Hand financial assistance program application. Due to the severity of her medical condition, within days the patient was approved for a 100 percent discount. The patient was able to stay in the hospital and breathe easier without having to worry about medical bills, on top of her other financial challenges.

**Aurora BayCare Medical Center, Green Bay**

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## Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

### ***Helping others to help themselves***

Paul is a married man and holds down two part-time jobs trying to make ends meet for his wife and himself. His wife is disabled, receives a Social Security income, and is on Medicare. Paul's jobs do not offer health insurance benefits to part-time employees so he is without any insurance benefits.

Paul has been ill for quite some time and is now suffering from end stage renal disease. He was recently approved to receive Part B Medicare but does not receive Social Security income. Paul is a proud man and tried to pay the bills for services prior to his Medicare eligibility himself; however, these bills were out of reach on his family's modest income. Holy Family Memorial's Community Care assistance was able to help Paul with his medical debt, prior to being eligible for Medicare, enabling him to concentrate on getting well. He is paying his Part B Medicare monthly premiums with his modest income thereby maintaining his Medicare Part B coverage.

**Holy Family Memorial Hospital, Manitowoc**

### ***A disabled tribal veteran***

A 47-year-old U.S. Army disabled tribal veteran, who is self-employed as a mechanic and earns \$450 per month, came into the Aurora Medical Center of Manitowoc County Emergency Department (ED) for a gastrointestinal blockage. It was determined that he needed surgery. He met with a financial counselor to discuss payment options. Upon full evaluation, the patient qualified for a 100 percent discount through the Aurora Helping Hand financial assistance program, relieving this gentleman of more than \$15,000 worth of medical bills and allowing him to seek regular treatment with a pathologist and follow-up outpatient testing.

**Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers**

### ***With hope there is help***

His hands were sweaty and shaking as he tried to figure out what to do when his girlfriend told him he was going to be a father. How would he support his baby when he has his own medical problems to take care of?

These thoughts were haunting a 21-year-old Milwaukee male patient at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center who came to the Emergency Department for help to "man up" to his responsibilities. He had health issues related to substance abuse, and it was quickly apparent he needed to be hospitalized. Unemployed and without income, he was not eligible to apply for BadgerCare coverage until the child is born. Meanwhile, his mother provided financial support, room and board to him.

The patient and his family were given the Aurora Helping Hand financial assistance application, which they were able to complete and return quickly – and gratefully.

On the ninth day of his hospitalization, a financial counselor who worked with patient was notified by an RN Case Manager that he would need antibiotic treatment for several weeks after discharge to recover completely. The doctor was ready to discharge the patient, but would not do so until he could be certain the patient was eligible for Aurora's Helping Hand financial assistance program. Despite a heavy volume of Helping Hand applications, and due to the severity of his condition, his application was expedited and the young man was approved for 100 percent assistance for his inpatient stay and follow-up medications.

**Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center, Milwaukee**

***Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at [mgrasmick@wha.org](mailto:mgrasmick@wha.org).***



Read more about hospitals connecting with their communities at [www.WiServePoint.org](http://www.WiServePoint.org).