



The Circleville Herald

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Thursday, August 26, 2004

Medicare rule threatens Berger rehabilitation unit

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(Left to right) James Sardo, M.D., medical Director of Berger's Rehab Center, and Sandy Rudawsky, Berger C.O.O., and are pictured with inpatient rehab patient Jesse Mays.

"We need every adult in the Pickaway County area to contact his or her U.S. Senators and Congressman! Please call, write or e-mail your U.S lawmakers." That's Berger Health System C.O.O. Sandy Rudawsky's appeal to the community in light of a Medicare rule, which has been enforced since July 1, 2004.

"This rule threatens the survival of many rehabilitation facilities. In fact, analysts expect the rule will force the closure of at least 170 of the 1,210 inpatient rehab programs across the country during the next few years. Fairfield Medical Center (Lancaster) has already closed its unit." Rudawsky is very concerned about the negative impact this Medicare rule will have on access to care for Pickaway County area patients and their referring physicians.

Hospital inpatient rehabilitation programs care for patients recovering from major orthopedic surgery (hip or knee replacements), stroke, trauma, and amputation.

The recently enforced Medicare rule, commonly called the "75 percent Rule," will deny access to a significant number of orthopedic hip and knee replacement patients at Berger Hospital. The Medicare rule specifies patient diagnoses approved for admission to an inpatient rehabilitation unit, and most hip and knee replacement patients do not meet these criteria.

Since more than 60 percent of Berger's Rehab Center patients are orthopedic joint replacement patients, its patient census would drop from nine patients to four patients daily. Berger's unit has successfully rehabilitated thousands of patients during the past 10 years, and has earned an outstanding reputation throughout central Ohio.

"We are deeply concerned about this Medicare rule because it limits access to high quality acute physical rehabilitation for many of our patients and their referring orthopedic surgeons. We are going to make every effort to get Medicare to revise this rule, but in the meantime we are arranging an alternative plan to meet the physical recovery needs of these hip and knee replacement patients."

Rudawsky went on to describe the alternative patient care plan: physical therapists will provide patient education for strengthening exercises and equipment use, such as walkers, during the patient's preoperative education session; a rehab assessment coordinator will meet with the patient and family prior to surgery to discuss rehabilitation needs and care options after the surgery.

Discharge options may include acute inpatient rehabilitation (if the Medicare criteria are met), an extended care facility, outpatient therapy, or home health; after surgery, the rehab assessment coordinator will evaluate the patient for appropriateness for admission to Berger's Rehab Center.

If the patient does not qualify for inpatient rehabilitation, alternative options are again discussed and a rehab

assessment coordinator works closely with a physical therapist to identify patients who can be discharged home, and ensures additional care and equipment needs are arranged for the home setting. A social worker will assist with ordering additional care and equipment; and the patient's surgeon may also consult with an occupational therapist to address in-home functional issues such as bathing and daily living activities.

This alternative approach to caring for recovering hip and knee replacement patients will expedite their physical rehabilitation, but will not be as intensive care as these patients would get at Berger's inpatient rehabilitation center. However, it is an attempt to better prepare patients by teaching strengthening exercises prior to surgery and educating them about their care after surgery.

Berger will make every effort to maintain the outstanding inpatient rehab center that its staff has worked so hard to create during the past 10 years. Officials say they need the community's support to reverse this Medicare rule that threatens the future of rehabilitation services to Pickaway County residents.

Rudawsky is serious in her appeal.

"We really need every adult in the Pickaway County area to contact his/her U.S. Senators and Congressman! Please call, write or e-mail your U.S lawmakers. Tell the lawmakers to 'support the Lowey-Wamp amendment.'"

This amendment would impose a moratorium on enforcement of the rule and require Medicare to study the rule and make recommendations for modernizing it.

It is expected that the House will vote on the legislation when Congress returns from recess in September.

Pickaway County readers can contact their lawmakers at the following locations:

Senator Mike Dewine, 317 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510;

Phone: 202-224-2353; web address:
.gov>

Senator George Voinovich, 317 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510;

Phone: 202-224-2315; web address:

U. S. Rep. Dave Hobson - 7th Congressional District, Lancaster District Office,

212 South Broad St., Room 55, Lancaster, OH 43130

Phone: 740-654-5149

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