

Healthy Indiana Plan has effect on 'charity care'

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It's a little tricky to tell how the state's expansion of Medicaid, Healthy Indiana Plan 2.0, has affected Dubois County and surrounding areas.

According to data from the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, 1,131 residents in Dubois County are enrolled in the HIP 2.0 plan. Spencer County has 828 residents; Pike 659; Orange 1,412; Martin 573; Daviess 1,606; Crawford 717 and Perry 881.

With Memorial Hospital in Jasper being one of the largest health care outlets in southwest Indiana, the facility sees about 250,000 patients a year. From data taken over the previous three years, Memorial has seen decreases in the percent of people who self-pay and also a decrease in the amount of uncompensated care the hospital provides.

In 2013, 4.7 percent of Memorial patients self-paid, followed by 5.6 percent in 2014, 4.6 percent in 2015 and only 3.6 percent so far this year. For 2014 and 2015, Memorial gave out about \$9 million in uncompensated care, but this year, the hospital is on pace for about \$7.2 million. In 2013, the hospital experienced its lowest amount of uncompensated care at a tick over \$6.7 million. Because of this, Memorial has seen a decrease in uncompensated care, or "charity care," for the first months of 2016 when compared to the same months in 2015.

"(Less uncompensated care) decreases the amount of 'free' care we provide," Memorial Vice President of Finance and CFO Randy Russell said in an email.

HIP 2.0, which is just more than a year old, was designed for increasing health care access for low-income individuals as Indiana's version of the Medicaid expansion created by the Affordable Care Act. Instead of fully adopting ACA, Indiana created an alternate system that incorporates personal responsibility by asking HIP 2.0 users to make contribution to their Personal Wellness and Responsibility (POWER) accounts, or what could be considered similar to a health savings accounts.

When HIP 2.0 was first implemented, there was concern that those who utilized HIP 2.0 couldn't contribute to POWER accounts, but Gov. Mike Pence announced in January that 70 percent of HIP 2.0 users had contributed. According to an Indy Star article in January, almost a third of HIP 2.0 reported that they've asked their doctors about health care costs, and more than half said they check how much money is in their POWER account. HIP 2.0 recipients have also reduced their emergency room use by about 40 percent, Pence has said. While 370,000 Hoosiers had signed up for the plan by the beginning of this year, Pence estimated that there were still another 130,000 eligible for HIP 2.0.

"There is something to be said about the dignity of empowering low-income individuals to make their own decisions about their own health care," Pence said in January. "The truth is that the Healthy Indiana Plan gives people the tools and empowers them to be able to make health care choices, which I think empowers every aspect of the person's life."