

Who will provide health care for the indigent?

Closing of John L. Doyne Hospital raises questions about where the working poor will get health care

By Julie Snelder

For more than 100 years, Milwaukee County's hospital, now known as John L. Doyne Hospital, has taken care of county residents who had no way of paying for their medical care.

That tradition will end around Dec. 21, when the private, nonprofit Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital takes over Doyne's programs and facilities in a sale/lease agreement the Milwaukee County Board approved earlier this year.

Last summer, the Milwaukee County Board approved a plan to transfer Doyne's programs and services to Froedtert. The Medical College of Wisconsin, whose faculty make up Doyne and Froedtert's medical staffs, also has been part of the transition. It will take over the operation of Doyne's medical clinics.

While lamenting the loss of the county's "hospital of last resort," many public and private community leaders agree the county had no choice but to turn the hospital over to Froedtert, which shares a campus with Doyne at the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center in Wauwatosa.

They also point out that Milwaukee County is not alone in deciding to close its public hospital, which has lost millions of dollars over the last several years. Public hospitals around the country are cutting back on services, privatizing their operations or shutting down entirely. With the health care industry ever more competitive, taxpayers can no longer afford to pay for the operation of many public hospitals.

After John L. Doyne Hospital closes, will there be a safety net for the working poor?



"You've got the government cutting back on Medicare and Medicaid, so it's likely more people will end up without sufficient health coverage."

Candice Owley,
president of the
Wisconsin
Federation of
Nurses and Health
Professionals



"The patients won't go away. They'll just end up in emergency rooms at hospitals throughout the community."

Marv Neely Jr.,
president of the
Hospital Council of
Greater Milwaukee

Officials have said Milwaukee County can make better use of its resources by being a health care purchaser rather than a health care provider. In doing so, they pointed out, the county is not turning its back on the poor, even though a recent change in state law means the county is no longer obligated to provide such care. The state and Milwaukee County have

committed to continue funding care for the indigent through a block grant program.

Under the Doyne-Froedtert agreement, Froedtert will be the preferred provider under the county's General Assistance Medical Program (GAMP). Through a combination of state and county funds, Froedtert will get about \$32 million for

1996 to provide care under GAMP, and about \$30 million in 1997.

In addition, the county expects to spend about \$1 million on a yet-to-be developed plan to provide primary care to indigent county residents at community clinics and health centers in their neighborhoods. Another \$5 million is earmarked for care at

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