

Interim Health Services Committee

Sen. Judy Lee, Chair

Jan. 7, 2016

Chairman Lee and members of the Committee: I am Dr. Chris Meeker, a board-certified emergency medicine physician and Chief Medical Officer at Sanford Health in Bismarck. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you information about dental-related visits health care providers see in hospital emergency departments.

For the 10 years I've been practicing in Bismarck, dental-related care has ranked in the top 10 reasons for emergency department visits and usually ranks in the top five.

As you know, access to dental practices that accept Medicaid is extremely difficult. For uninsured patients with no means to pay cash up front, it is virtually impossible to get dental care. These are the people who end up in our emergency departments and urgent care clinics. Unfortunately, emergency department providers are only able to provide temporary treatment, including local anesthetics for pain, drainage of abscesses, temporary fillings and antibiotics for infection. The underlying dental problem often remains and requires further definitive treatment.

This committee requested information specific to the quantity of self-pay and Medicaid-covered patients presenting in emergency departments. Of the total patient volume treated in Sanford emergency departments seeking dental care during the past six months, more than 75 percent were either self-pay or covered by Medicaid:

Sanford Health Bismarck Emergency Department—78% Medicaid and self-pay

- Medicaid Expansion: 25%
- Medicaid: 22%
- Self-pay: 31%

Sanford Health Fargo Emergency Department—75% Medicaid and self-pay

- Medicaid Expansion: 23%
- Medicaid: 22%
- Self-pay: 30%

In addition to the toll poor access to dental care has on community members, there is a significant cost to the community as a whole. An April 2015 Health Policy Institute Brief (“Emergency Department Use for Dental Conditions Continues to Increase”) reported the average cost for an emergency room dental visit is \$749—significantly higher than the average cost of care in a dental clinic. Increasing access to preventive and acute dental care for the uninsured and underinsured population is a humane, less costly, effective solution.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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