

July 15, 2009

Dear Editor:

As noted in Kate Linebaugh's *Wall Street Journal* article ("Slump Spreads to Health Care as Michigan Loses Auto Jobs," July 13), the share of Michigan residents under age 65 using public insurance such as Medicaid rose to 22 percent last year, doubling from 11 percent a decade earlier. While these numbers are troubling, an equally – if not more - troubling statistic is that Medicaid enrollees are four times more likely than privately insured patients to use the emergency room. This reality has overwhelmed emergency departments in Michigan and across the country, turning the ER system into a vastly over-utilized and very expensive alternative for non-urgent medical care.

There are new approaches that can address this challenge today, providing more efficient and better care for patients, while also sparing rapidly depleting state Medicaid budgets. In fact, Health Plan of Michigan, one of Michigan's largest Medicaid health plans serving nearly 200,000 Medicaid members throughout the state, recently rolled out a new Web-based service from Vital Data Technology. The service provides key historic patient health data in real time to the ER, enhancing emergency care professionals' ability to treat patients more efficiently and effectively, while minimizing costly and/or dangerous measures that may arise from a lack of critical patient-specific health data. In addition, for the first time Health Plan of Michigan care managers are now able to receive real-time information about member ER visits, allowing them to immediately follow up and ensure that members understand ER discharge instructions. They also have a more immediate opportunity to enroll those with chronic health conditions into disease management, wellness or other preventive care programs– thereby minimizing the chance of repeat visits to the ER.

Unlike other health information technology initiatives, Vital Data Technology's solutions are delivering value today to all appropriate stakeholders – health plans, health plan members, emergency and primary care professionals. And, results are being achieved at a fraction of the cost of other similar initiatives that have spent a lot of money to date but have yet to be market tested and proven.

While the challenges of improving healthcare are significant, they are not insurmountable. And, our company and our partners in Michigan and elsewhere are illustrating how private enterprise solutions can drive accountable, sustainable, effective and affordable change in the way in which healthcare services are accessed and delivered in the U.S.

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