

Village may switch billing services

Written by MARK JAEGER

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After decade with LifeQuest, committee cites savings as justification for changing vendors

The Village of Saukville has been contracting with LifeQuest to handle ambulance billing since April 2003, but that arrangement may be coming to a close.

The Public Safety Committee has recommended the village switch vendors, turning over its ambulance billing to EMS Medical Billing Associates.

Although officials said they are satisfied with the service they have received from LifeQuest, the prospect of saving a substantial amount of money forced some comparison shopping.

A decade ago, LifeQuest was the only local option for ambulance billing. The service relieves the ambulance service from much of the responsibility for seeking payment for emergency medical care.

In the intervening years, competition has surfaced. With no coaxing from the village, the Milwaukee-based EMS Medical Billing put together what officials saw as a competitive billing package.

Under the three-year contract proposed by EMS, the company would keep 8% of the net payments received. It would also retain 33% of net payments received through external collection, and 17% of funds received through the Tax Refund Intercept Program.

“Now that there is competition, we wanted to see if we could get similar service at a lower cost,” Village Administrator Dawn Wagner told the committee.

Cedarburg and Newburg use EMS for billing.

Up until the competing billing proposal was received, LifeQuest had been keeping 15% of base collections, along with as much as 45% of external collections.

After learning that another billing firm was being considered, LifeQuest reduced its base fee to 8% of fees collected in a new three-year proposal. Payments received after extra measures would range between 22% and 33%.

“I don’t know that we would have seen these reduced rates without contacting EMS,” Wagner said.

Fire Chief Gilly Schultz did not make a recommendation on which billing service to use, but said it was disturbing that the price break from LifeQuest was so late in coming.

“You have to be the judge, but I am a little upset we had to pay 15% for all these years,” Schultz said.

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Ambulance Chief Shari Kirsch said it is difficult to ignore the bottom line.

“I am satisfied with the job LifeQuest has been doing, but EMS looks like the better deal in terms of rates,” Kirsch said.

Like LifeQuest, village officials were told EMS would make regular recommendations on when adjustments are needed in ambulance fees.

Although Schultz said the village needs to be aware of what neighboring communities are charging for ambulance services, especially Port Washington, there is a limit.

“I want the village to be able to cover its expenses, but I don’t want the costs to get so high that our elderly residents choose not to call the ambulance when they need help,” he said.

The recommendation to switch to EMS was unanimously backed by the committee and will be forwarded to the Finance Committee and Village Board.