

New deals to change health care in Delaware prisons

Responsibilities split among three vendors

By ESTEBAN PARRA • The News Journal • May 5, 2010

Three new vendors will replace the company that provides medical care in Delaware's prisons, the state's response to five years of criticism and turmoil over the quality of inmate health care.

Correction Commissioner Carl C. Danberg acknowledged the agreements Tuesday, shortly after he signed a \$29.8 million contract with Nashville-based Correct Care Solutions, which will serve as the general health care provider. On Monday, Danberg said, he signed a \$10 million contract with MHM Services Inc., of Vienna, Va., and a \$700,000 contract with Correct Rx Pharmacy Services Inc. of Linthicum, Md.

MHM Services will provide mental health and substance abuse treatment to the **Department of Correction**. Correct Rx will fulfill pharmacy responsibilities. The two-year contracts, with optional one-year extensions, go into effect July 1, the day after St. Louis-based Correctional Medical Services' contract expires. The new contracts are expected to be announced today.

The breakup of the single medical health care contract was a result of frustration with CMS, the subject of a 2005 investigation by The News Journal. The newspaper's series brought to light problems with high inmate death rates, especially from AIDS and suicide. It also pointed out neglect of sick inmates who were in filthy infirmaries that sometimes lacked beds.

Following the series, a federal monitor was appointed by the U.S. Justice Department to oversee prison health care. The state entered a three-year agreement in 2006 with the Justice Department to improve inmate health care.

Delaware was allowed to extend the agreement last year after federal officials said the state had demonstrated "tremendous progress" in improving prison health care.

One incident documented by the newspaper's investigation described the condition of Anthony Pierce, who became known as "the brother with two heads" as an inmate at Sussex Correctional Institution because of a large tumor growing on his head. Pierce, who was being treated by CMS staff, died from the brain tumor in 2002, during a previous contract the company held with the state prisons. CMS settled a lawsuit filed by Pierce's family.

"The good news is that [Correctional Medical Services] no longer will be providing poor, inadequate and incompetent health care for the Department of Correction," said the Rev. Christopher Bullock, senior pastor of Wilmington's Canaan Baptist Church and a founder of the Delaware Coalition for Prison Reform and Justice, which had repeatedly called for Correctional Medical Services to be replaced.

"Now we start the new chapter, a new beginning, and hopefully these new vendors will deliver quality services to and for the state of Delaware, particularly for those who are incarcerated," Bullock said.

While the new contracts will cost the state 1.8 percent more than the current \$39.8 million CMS contract, Danberg said the three new vendors had

Advertisement



Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momslike.me.com
where Local moms meet

the best proposals of all 24 bidders, which included CMS as well as four Delaware companies.

"These vendors put together the best proposals and showed my team that they had not just the ability to do the job, but the right business model to come in here and work collaboratively with the Department of Correction," Danberg said.

Under the new contracts, Community Education Centers of West Caldwell, N.J., which provides substance abuse care to inmates, also will be replaced by MHM Services. Community Education Centers was not a focus of criticism during its contract.

Danberg announced in October that the department would take bids for a new contract with modifications aimed at improving care, including breaking the contract into smaller pieces to allow multiple companies to provide more specialized service.

The move encouraged many who had complained of ongoing problems with CMS, including a federal monitor who repeatedly pointed out a lack of "stable and effective" leadership by the health care provider.

Word of the new vendors brought relief to those who have battled with CMS.

"As far as I'm concerned, it can only get better," said Wilmington attorney Jeffrey K. Martin, who has defended several inmates in federal court and complained about medical conditions in state prisons. "I just hope that they can be responsive to the many needs of the inmates and not ignore needs that are expressed through multiple grievances that have been denied."

Dover lawyer Steve Hampton said CMS had plenty of warning and time to clean up its act, but appeared not to have done much about it.

"I'm hopeful that the new providers will be more conscientious and I'm also hopeful that, if they aren't, the administration acts a little quicker this time to force some standards," Hampton said.

Although Bullock had been asking for local companies to replace CMS, he said he had heard good things about the new companies.

"I'm pleased with these groups, and now they will be held to the same standard CMS was held," he said. "We expect them to provide a quality product."

Danberg said he believes the new vendors will provide quality health care for the state's 6,400 inmates.

"If the system does not improve under this new contracting model, then all of this effort and work has been for naught," he said. "Do we think it's going to work? Absolutely. Am I a little nervous about it? You bet."

Contact Esteban Parra at 324-2299 or eparra@delawareonline.com.

Advertisement

The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top left. The main title "AutoPilot" is in a large, bold, black font, with a blue airplane icon to its right. Below the title is a smartphone displaying the app's interface, which includes a "USA TODAY Meeting" section with a date of "Sep 21, 2009", a flight status "A6 BNA to IAD Landed 09/21/2009 11:48 AM", and weather information "73° Washington (AD) Partly Cloudy". To the right of the phone, the text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". Below this, it says "Presented by: Hampton" with the Hampton logo. At the bottom right, a blue box contains the text "SEE HOW IT WORKS >>".

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™