

**Vision**

The North Dakota Healthcare Association will take an active leadership role in major healthcare issues.

Mission

The North Dakota Healthcare Association exists to advance the health status of persons served by the membership.

TESTIMONY
INDUSTRY, BUSINESS AND LABOR INTERIM COMMITTEE
MARCH 6, 2008

Chairman Berg, Members of the Industry, Business and Labor Interim Committee. I am Arnold Thomas, President of the North Dakota Healthcare Association.

The NDHA recently conducted a survey of the state's nine largest hospitals to see what they thought of their interaction with WSI. Hospitals have a unique perspective on WSI, on one hand they are employers and on the other hand, they are the medical service providers.

As employers, the survey showed that hospitals are supportive of the worker safety programs sponsored by WSI and they complimented WSI's staff responsiveness to questions regarding coverage that may be provided if a hospital employee is involved in a work related accident. The hospitals found WSI staff very easy to work with.

When an injured worker's claim is denied and the appeals process kicks in, the survey showed that the hospitals were not dissatisfied with the process. They did, however, indicate that we are seeing changes in our workplace, changes in our workforce, and ever changing practices in the delivery of medicine. They believe that this should be the impetus for instituting a review of the employee appeal process on a regular basis.

From the perspective of medical service providers, hospitals reported that WSI pays in a timely fashion and they indicated no major dissatisfaction with the current claims appeals process.

WSI has a quality assurance program. WSI reviews the medical services provided to injured workers to ensure that the services were appropriate. Two thirds of the hospitals surveyed had no opinion about this oversight mechanism. The remainder expressed general satisfaction with it.

With respect to payment for services provided, the hospitals indicated that WSI payment schedules for both inpatient and outpatient services come closer to the actual cost of the services than do either Medicaid or Medicare. However, WSI payment schedules still lag behind private sector payors. Put another way, this payment failure to cover service costs continues the perception of North Dakota as a low payor state.

If one combines the results of this survey with ongoing discussions involving the North Dakota hospital community, it becomes clear that there are opportunities for collaboration with WSI. These discussions could and should include:

- The criteria, structure, and process involved in WSI's quality assurance program;
- Workplace safety assessment;

- Workplace safety promotion;
- Worker safety assessment;
- The criteria, structure, and process of benefit appeals; and
- The criteria, structure, and process of payment appeals.

Presently, there are no structured venues within which the WSI can address these issues of common interest with hospitals. We would encourage the WSI to explore the creation of task forces for this purpose.

Thank you Chairman Berg for this opportunity to address the committee.