

PUBLIC PULSE

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EXPLAINS CLEVELAND HOSPITAL DEFICIT

To The Editor of The Journal-Patriot:

In the September 8th issue of The Journal-Patriot the Cleveland County Hospital in Shelby was cited by Mr. John H. Joiner, author of the article, as an example of a hospital operating with a deficit.

Of course, it is only natural that the opposition to the North Wilkesboro hospital, as proposed, would use as an illustration the worst cases that could be found from the standpoint of financial

operation. As a matter of fact, of the 132 Duke-endowed hospitals in the two Carolinas, 88 of these hospitals showed an operating surplus while only 44 had an operating deficit during the year 1947 and this was the worst year for deficits within the last ten-year period. With the experience that the people of North Wilkesboro have had in the successful operation of the Wilkes Hospital, there is no reason whatever to believe that we will discard all good business management and follow a policy which would result in financial losses as experienced by a small minority of the hospitals now in operation.

However, in order to get the facts regarding the Cleveland County Hospital, as referred to by Mr. Joiner in his recent article, I took the privilege of writing Mr. O. M. Mull, a prominent attorney of Shelby, a former and outstanding member of state legislature, a former trustee of the Cleveland hospital and

now one of the trustees of the Baptist hospital in Winston-Salem. I asked Mr. Mull to explain the financial operation of the Cleveland County Hospital and to give the reasons why this hospital had operated with a deficit, as had been reported.

In Mr. Mull's letter he states that the people of Shelby township voted bonds in the amount of 100,000 dollars with which they built the hospital in Shelby in 1922. According to Mr. Mull, "this hospital was operated by a board appointed by the city until 1943 when the people of Cleveland county decided to take over the hospital and operate it as a county project. At the time the city turned the hospital over to the county, its property was worth more than \$300,000. During the 20 years the city operated the hospital, it was enlarged from 33 beds to a 90-bed hospital, and a modern nurses' home to accommodate 40 nurses was built."

Mr. Mull further states: "In 1943, Cleveland county voted \$400,000.00 in bonds for the purpose of enlarging the hospital and paying approximately \$50,000.00 original bonds outstanding against the city. This bond money is now held awaiting action by our state and federal government."

"The county took over a going concern that had been making its own way and appointed a new board of trustees to manage same. It was a rather large institution and a new board did experience financial difficulties. My information is that the deficit at the beginning of the present year aggregated between \$24,000.00 and \$25,000.00. Facing this situation, I am informed, the hospital board tightened up on their management and are operating within its income at present. The president of the board tells me that the deficit resulted principally from the fact that the board was receiving \$2.00 per day for charity cases that cost approximately three times that amount."

"Our experience confirms that the financial management of a hospital is quite similar to the financial management of any other business operation. The management can carry on by spending what it receives or can spend more than it makes just as any other business operation. If you have a board of efficient business men and women to manage the finances of your hospital they will not spend more on charity than the people of your county plus other resources are

willing to pay for.

"I have been connected with the N. C. Baptist Hospital at Winston for a number of years. We do a lot of work for your people and will gladly continue to do so but I do not believe the civic-minded citizens of your town and county will be willing to deprive their citizens of local hospital care. Our N. C. Baptist hospital is more definitely suited to handle the cases that an ordinary local hospital is not equipped to serve."

I think that Mr. Mull's statement from Mr. Mull clearly points out that with efficient management of the hospital by a capable board of trustees composed of good business men and women, we should have no fear of an operating deficit.

As in operating any other institution, organization or business, the charges for services must be set at a rate to cover necessary expense. So to those who look only at the dollar mark in connection with the operation of a hospital, the financial reports of all the hospitals, rather than a few isolated cases, will convince you that operating deficits are not an immense burden around the necks of the taxpayers. And to those who see beyond the dollar mark and realize their moral and humanitarian obligations, I am sure you are not going to let this matter worry you, anyway. To those who have registered, let's unite and pass this hospital bond issue and give to the people of North Wilkesboro and Wilkes county adequate and needed health facilities.

Sincerely yours,
J. B. WILLIAMS.

Some people are so pig-headed that they won't take advice even when they are paying for it.



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