

**NEW PROGRAM RECRUITS**

# Medicaid Program Woos Doctors

BY TERRY POPE

Fewer doctors are accepting Medicaid patients, creating a shortage of health care providers for the poor. It's a trend that has both state and local health officials worried.

A new program hopes to recruit Brunswick County doctors who are willing to become health care providers for Medicaid patients.

Carolina Access is a company endorsed by the state that pays doctors monthly retainer fees if they are willing to accept Medicaid patients.

Medicaid is a program that pays medical bills for eligible low income people who can't afford the cost of health care. The bills are paid by federal, state and county taxes.

"I think it's still going to be difficult getting doctors," said Jamie Orrock, Brunswick County's Department of Social Services director.

The Access program will contract with primary care physicians, paying them a monthly fee of around \$15 per month for each patient, whether the patients visit the doctor or not. For their services, Access will be reimbursed by the state. No local funds are involved.

Medicaid patients are allowed to select a doctor from a list of those participating in the program. The doctors and patients are then under contract for a year to provide and to receive medical care.

"It's similar to having a retainer fee with an attorney," Orrock said.

Carolina Access began in Rocky

Mount and comes to Brunswick County having been highly endorsed by Nash and Edgecombe counties, Orrock said.

"In Brunswick County, many of our providers are no longer accepting any new Medicaid patients," said Lillie Barnes, DSS income maintenance supervisor. "This makes it hard on our clients. We receive calls constantly requesting names of doctors that accept Medicaid."

Doctors who do treat Medicaid patients must file with the state to be reimbursed for their charges. No money is paid to the Medicaid patient.

Medicaid is run through the state by the Division of Medical Assistance in the N.C. Department of Human Resources. To be eligible, persons must meet income and asset limits, and be aged, blind, disabled, a member of a family with dependent children or pregnant.

It is not to be confused with Medicare, a health insurance program for people over 65 and some disabled people. Medicare is run by the federal government through the Social Security Administration.

Persons apply for Medicaid at the county DSS office, which determines if a person is eligible. In March, the office accepted 155 new Medicaid applications, Ms. Barnes reported.

The total number of Medicaid eligible patients in Brunswick County increased from 3,862 in February to 4,599 in March, she reported.

"We're averaging 300 to 500 new

cases per month," said Orrock. "In all likelihood, it will slow down in the next few months."

Ms. Barnes asked the DSS board to look at ways to lure doctors into accepting Medicaid patients or to consider a clinic for Medicaid recipients. She said many clients end up going to New Hanover County or North Myrtle Beach, S.C., for treatment because of the shortage of participating doctors locally.

DSS board member Judy Clemmons said she witnessed an incident at The Brunswick Hospital that made her think about the shortage of doctors who do accept Medicaid patients. An emergency room patient there was told that she would have to wait over two hours for a Medicaid doctor to see her, Ms. Clemmons said.

"The newer doctors are more likely to participate," Orrock said. "Ones that are well-established usually don't."

Monitorings and delays in receiving reimbursements from the state often irritate doctors, he added.

"The incentive is here for the doctor to participate," Orrock added. "He's going to get a certain amount of income, regardless."

A negative to the Medicaid program is when claims are lost within the system or filed improperly. When Medicaid claims are not paid within six months, Orrock said, the state stops payment.

"Then the doctor will not get paid," he added.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

## Waccamaw Wins Battle Of Books

This team from Waccamaw Elementary School won the Brunswick County Battle of the Books April 16 and will compete for the regional title Friday in Jacksonville. The competition for sixth, seventh and eighth graders is based on information about 28 books the students have read and follows a Quiz Bowl format. Pictured are (seated, from left) students Rebecca DeRosa, Crystal Bales, Joyce Nelson, Jamie Hewett, (standing, from left) Shanna King, Ashli Smith, Aimee Duncan, Michael Todd and their coach, Leacy Pierce.

## Session Will Train Senior 'Counselors'

A training session for Senior Health Insurance Information Program (S.H.I.I.P.) volunteer counselors begins June 5 at the Brunswick County Agricultural Extension Service office at Bolivia.

Seniors and other volunteers who complete the course may serve as "counselors" for senior citizens in their communities, helping them with their health insurance problems, said Pearl W. Stanley, home economics extension agent.

The training sessions cover medical insurance, consumer education and related subjects. Hours will be from 10 a.m. to 12 noon June 5, 12, 19 and 26, and July 3 and 10.

Friday, April 26, is the deadline to register for the training, which will be held by a representative of the N.C. Department of Insurance.

To register, call the extension office at 253-4425.

## Suit Filed Against Two In Fatal Wreck

A Charlotte woman has filed suit against two people who were in a car that wrecked in July 1990, an accident that claimed the life of her son.

Liddle Ann Wilson is asking in excess of \$10,000 from two defendants, Jeffrey Green, of Charlotte, and Ricky Green, of Bolton.

The lawsuit filed by Greensboro attorney Lee Andrews on April 12 in Brunswick County Superior Court claims one of the two men was driving the car that wrecked on Ash-Little River Road last July 8.

In that accident, Ricky Alvin Wilson, 25, of Route 4, Shallotte, was

thrown from the vehicle and died.

According to State Trooper W.H. Thompson's report, Wilson was listed as the initial driver of the car pending an investigation.

The accident occurred around 1:20 a.m. near Hickman's Crossroads about 12 miles south of Shallotte. According to Thompson, the 1990 Pontiac was traveling at a high rate of speed, estimated at 80 mph, when the driver lost control of the car, which ran into a ditch and overturned.

The complaint states that Wilson was a passenger in the back seat of

the car when it wrecked. Jeffery Green is listed as the owner of the car, the suit contends.

It claims that either Jeffrey or Ricky Green operated the car in a reckless manner and at a speed greater than the posted maximum limit.

It asks for in excess of \$10,000 to pay for funeral and medical bills and loss wages Wilson would have earned, an amount to be proven at the trial.

The lawsuit also asks for a jury trial and any further relief the court wishes to award.

## Reservists Receive Baskets From Youth Advisory Council

Members of the Youth Advisory Council at South Brunswick Middle School made Easter baskets for the 127 reservists stationed at Sunny Point Military Ocean Terminal during the Middle East War.

They baked a variety of cookies in the school cafeteria and decorated three baskets, which were delivered March 29 to the N.C. Baptist Assembly at Fort Caswell, where the sol-

diers are staying while in the area.

YAC members include Kristen Kirby, Catina Gordon, Derrick Fullwood, Gary Lewis, Chris McLean, James Lineberry, Charlie Padgett, Melandy Mobley, Leaf Hoy, John Peterson, Ramey Higgins, Matthew LeGrande, Sherri Vaught, Thomas Turner, Charles Simmons, Keeley Walters, William Walker, Edmund Randolph and Charles Blue.

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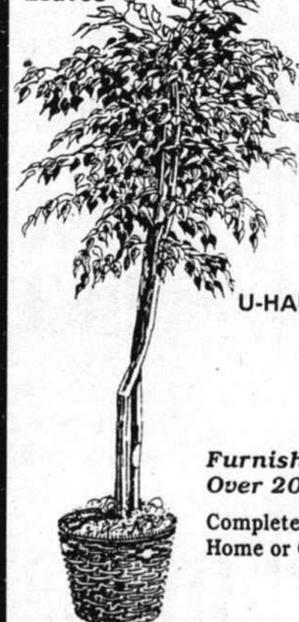
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