

March 8, 2023

Dear Representative Acomb and Senator Morrison:

CentraCare is the main healthcare provider for all shelters in the Greater St. Cloud area, and there is great need for recuperative care services for people in our community who are experiencing homelessness. When our staff plan for discharge of these patients, there are many circumstances in play to ensure they can successfully continue their treatments outside of our system.

Some of the challenges we struggle with today include:

- patients who want to go back to a shelter, but the shelter isn't comfortable with their role (even if just reminders/oversight) related to the treatments the patient will need.
- patients who are experiencing homelessness and have a condition that needs some short-term management that will be impossible/unsafe if they aren't in a shelter with access to running water, etc. but the shelter needs more support. Those leaving with IV antibiotics for X weeks as one example.

Patients without a safe place to discharge often remain in the hospital for much longer than necessary. Today, we partner with shelters to provide home health services and our community paramedics will visit patients in these settings. Our Coordinated Care Department has two outreach nurses who mostly work in the shelters and provide care for those unhoused patients who are well enough to be discharged from the hospital. A Nurse Practitioner from Coordinated Care also goes to the shelter once a week for a half day to meet with patients that are unable to get to the clinic. There is currently one community paramedic who specializes in care for the unhoused population- she works closely with our two outreach nurses to provide care for some of these patients. These options are extremely limited and cannot meet the needs of all patients. Currently, we are not able to bill for any of these services and therefore there isn't any structured program in place for this patient population.

The option of a stable, long-term funding source for people who are experiencing homelessness who are not well enough to discharge to shelter will provide the infrastructure needed to fill in this gap in care in our area. A Recuperative Care option will provide a way we can intervene to provide care before someone must go to the Emergency Department. We are eager to partner with housing settings in our area to explore what this possibility could look like, and how we could improve care and break the cycle of homelessness.

Jodi Gertken
Director, State Government and Community Relations