



Insurance woes worry some

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WARRENSBURG -- For Lila Harrington, the Warrensburg Health Center is convenient. She can visit her doctor, do her grocery shopping and make a relatively short drive home to Thurman, usually in one morning.

But it also reminds the retired schoolteacher of caring for her sick children and an ill husband over the last 20 years.

"I feel a great affinity to this place," she said. "There is an emotional connection; I love all the doctors here."

But Harrington might soon have to go elsewhere for health care.

Hudson Headwaters Health Network, which runs the center, is threatening to stop recognizing two of the area's largest health insurance companies -- MVP Healthcare and Blue Shield of Northeastern New York -- unless those companies increase payments for office visits and primary care services.

Spokesmen for both MVP and Blue Shield said earlier this week that negotiations are ongoing with Hudson Headwaters.

Harrington, who has Blue Shield health insurance, said she would probably have to go to Glens Falls for doctor appointments if her coverage ended.

"That's a lot more of a trip to ask someone to take," she said after a podiatrist appointment Thursday. "With gas the way it is, we older people don't have the money or support to do that."

Hudson Headwaters operates eight medical centers in the area: Warrensburg, Bolton Landing, Indian Lake, Chester, North Creek, Schroon Lake, Ticonderoga and Moriah.

Outside the medical center in Warrensburg on Thursday, most visitors had not heard about the insurance dispute.

When told, many dug through their wallets, producing dog-eared insurance cards to check if their plans would be affected.

When MVP subscriber John Kennedy heard he might have to travel to Glens Falls for his family's medical care, he shook his head.

"They (Hudson Headwaters) have no competition, because they're the only ones in the area," said Kennedy, a forklift operator who lives in Warrensburg. "It's not like there's another clinic in the area."

Hudson Headwaters Executive Director Dr. John Ruggie said Thursday patients are worried about the ongoing negotiations.

"People are certainly concerned," he said. "People don't want to lose their doctor. So far, we're hoping that everybody is on board."

For many in this rural area, having a doctor within a convenient distance is something they don't want to lose, visitors to the medical center said Thursday.

They ranged from people with loved ones who need frequent blood tests because of diabetes to children who were injured playing sports or people merely picking up prescriptions.

"They have our dental office; they have our pharmacy," said Melanie Hall, a Blue Shield subscriber.

Hall, a grocery store employee and union member, said she wouldn't be able to switch insurance if Hudson Headwaters stopped accepting Blue Shield.

"We have to stick with this plan," she said. "It's through the union, so we're stuck."