

To: GMCB

From: Sharon Gutwin Owner of the RehabGYM

Date: August 22, 2023

Re: UVMHN Budget Review

(For submission under public comments as well.)

I respect the challenges UVMHN faces, but as you listen to their argument why they deserve a 24% increase after years/decades of budget approvals that have allowed them to grow in wealth and scope, think about my healthcare business and all other healthcare businesses not protected directly by the GMCB. You have heard testimony from Tom Weigel MD, representing BCBS, who explained how community provider rates remain fairly flat across the board while board regulated hospitals have seen large rate increases. The GMCB is charged with Vermont's healthcare system. Regulation is meant to keep what is regulated in check. This has not happened to date due to the lack of consideration of the private sector. I do see the potential for this year being the first year since conception of the GMCB to regulate with intention to meet the mission of the board. ***"to improve the health of Vermonters through a high-quality, accessible, affordable and sustainable healthcare system."***

UVMHN is a hospital and only a part of the healthcare system. A hospital is designed to care for sick and injured. It is NOT designed to improve population health in the way of prevention. That would be putting a fox in charge of the hen house. You can no more expect a hospital to be successful at preventing sick people than KFC preventing people from eating chicken. A business model does not thrive on the opposite. Frankly, not even primary care should be sought to champion the cause of prevention. Chronic disease is the number one cost to our healthcare system. Testing and drugs while important in diagnosing and helpful in minimizing the progression, does not cure the disease and this treatment is highly expensive. The only cure comes early (as with all other diseases) and in these cases through lifestyle changes. Prevention for diabetes comes when a person is identified with BMI above 25...not waiting until their A1c is over 5.7 and administering a successful treatment of exercise/activity, nutrition, and behavioral modification. This treatment is not best delivered in a primary care office. It takes a community of providers dedicated solely to wellness with no conflict of interest and nothing to gain if they fail...only gain in succeeding.

Radical reform is needed... was actually needed a long time ago. To hold onto the belief that those who led us to where we are today, can somehow get us to where we need to be, is insane. "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result" ... Einstein.

There is no better time for a paradigm shift than now. Investment is most needed in effective community health and wellness treatment, not hospital based. It is community primary care, physical and occupational therapy, nutrition, mental health, prenatal, postnatal, and pediatric health, social work... that are on the front lines of keeping people out of the most expensive care of hospitals. And support should go into research-based health coaching and other proven services that effectively improve population health. Vermonters must have this care covered by insurers first and foremost.

If it does not happen that hospitals can be effectively regulated this time around, when will it be? I know that next year, if BCBS and MVP do not increase their reimbursements enough to cover the cost of care at the RehabGYM, we will be forced to go out of network. This is NOT what is best for Vermonters who will lose access if they are unable to contribute more to the cost of PT, but this is the result of UVMHN demanding and insurers paying up to 4 times the cost for same services. It is upsetting to me after 20 years of devotion to community health to have it come to the crisis we now face, but this is a result of not having any other recourse. As the RehabGYM and potentially more community health providers go out of network, this will shift care even further to hospitals, accelerating the cost of healthcare and insurance premiums. I implore the GMCB weigh the consequences of this season's decisions... as well as giving you my deepest respect of your vital role.

