

Jim Barnhart [responded](#) to letters to the editor concerning high cost of care at PIMC. None of Mr. Barnhart's response provided evidence to refute the claims being raised of high PIMC charges. He did not compare PIMC charges to the old Inter Island Medical Clinic nor to the charges of independent physicians on San Juan Island, Lopez, or East Sound.

What does PIMC charge for an appointed general office visit in comparison to the old clinic or independent physician offices? What is the comparison for a walk-in or an urgent care visit? How about the comparative cost of x-rays or sutures? What about a comparison of the twenty most frequently billed services?

Many Islanders are not getting answers to these questions until they get their bill in the 300% increase range, and they don't like the answers - especially when they remember they are paying taxes as well to support PIMC .

While Mr. Barnhart did not address primary care, he did tell us mainland hospitals charge two to three times what PIMC does for emergency services. Perhaps it would be instructive if he would name those hospitals and post a comparison of rates so Islanders can avoid them.

Mr. Barnhart said, of the 375 patients seen in the Emergency Department (ED), 41 were transferred and 47 more were able to stay on the island for the first time. This leaves the remainder of 287 patients.

Some of these 287 patients were emergencies who went directly to the ED for care. Others of the 287 arrived at the ED from the clinic when PIMC eliminated walk-in and urgent care in the clinic during clinic hours, closed the clinic on Saturday, Sunday, and evenings and began sending these patients to the ED.

So, patients seen in the ED were a mixture of emergency and non-emergency, who were to be triaged by the ED doctors to determine who was a real emergency and who was not.

The question is; how many of the 287 were treated and billed as walk-in or urgent care (non emergency) and what did their bills look like in comparison to how they would have been billed in the old clinic or how they would be billed in independent doctor's offices?

Let's remember, the clinic is short of doctors, can't be open as many hours as it used to be, can't have open doctor slots or doctors on call to treat walk-in and urgent care patients which means, the only care available to these people without appointments is located in the well staffed ED. This does not make them emergency patients. The nature of their illness or injury and the level of skill, facilities and equipment required to treat them determines if they are emergencies.

Patients should not bear the financial burden of the medical center's staffing problems.

Yes, Islanders want a "beautiful healing environment" and we appreciate the generosity of the private donors who made PIMC possible. But now that the new center is here and our old clinic is gone, we need to deal honestly with sticker shock and take a look at how we can deliver emergency and even more importantly primary care in an integrated cost effective manner.

Being told to take your child to the emergency room (and pay that high price) when she is running a fever and you can't get her into the clinic is just not acceptable, and it didn't used to be that way. We want and need access to affordable healthcare delivered at the appropriate cost effective level.

PeaceHealth, you can do it if you will.

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