

Testimony of Matthew W. Forge
Pullman Regional Hospital CEO

Good afternoon Chairs Rodgers and Guthrie, Ranking Members Pallone and Eshoo and members of the Committee.

I am Matt Forge, Chief Executive Officer for Pullman Regional Hospital, installed November 2022. I have served as a leader in rural healthcare in the states of Idaho, Washington and Wisconsin for more than eight years and understand the importance of transparency in pricing, especially as it relates to supporting effective healthcare decision-making for individuals and families seeking healthcare. Thank you for the opportunity to share Pullman Regional's journey toward price transparency.

Pullman Regional Hospital is a 25-bed critical access hospital nestled in the wheat fields of Eastern Washington in Pullman, WA. Originally on the campus of Washington State University, Pullman Regional opened its doors to a new 95,000 square-foot-facility in 2004, about two miles away from campus.

Today we are a hospital with eleven clinics and offer healthcare services ranging from psychiatry, 3D digital mammography, robotic-assisted surgery to a family medicine residency center and a very busy emergency department serving two college towns.

We are an independent, public district hospital governed by an elected board of commissioners.

Our journey as a transparent organization started before federal requirements. As a community hospital close to two Universities we serve an educated population and value being a patient-focused provider of healthcare that helps our patients make educated decisions.

In 2019 we published a price estimation tool, list of patient prices and a charge description master portal on our transparency webpage.

Our goal was to make these tools simple enough to understand but comprehensive enough to be thorough. Keeping information up-to-date as rules and regulations change is a continual work in progress, but Pullman Regional Hospital is committed to helping our community make educated decisions about their healthcare.

Pulling together pricing information and comparing ourselves in the regional market identified several services that were priced much higher than our competitors; this gave us the opportunity investigate how we lower our costs for medical devices and components so that we could pass that savings to patients.

Pullman Regional Hospital is one of five hospitals within an hour's drive, and that environment has helped us remain competitive in pricing, quality and breadth of services.

Philanthropy through donations and grant awards have also helped us in our transparency journey. Most years our operating margin is 2% and any additional capital spend necessary to continue improvements to our hospital comes from philanthropy. Grants and donations for expansion projects and medical technology have helped us upgrade our spaces so that we can serve more patients and attract high quality physicians to practice rural medicine. Grant and donor stewardship is transparency in how funds were used.

While we were ahead of the federal regulations around pricing transparency this helped us broaden our efforts to have a pricing model that was consistent, fair and deliberate. We always want to focus on what is best for patients and help simplify the complexities of healthcare.

This journey of transparency hasn't been easy and it will continue to be a work in progress. It's a challenge to provide comprehensive healthcare and necessary services like behavioral health with the current reimbursement models. Providing comprehensive, accessible, affordable and quality healthcare as a public district hospital is a challenge. Maintaining staffing levels and recruiting and retaining quality providers in a rural environment is a challenge. Charity care requirements have doubled, adding to this challenge.

These are our challenges as we continue to prioritize patient care and help our patients know what to expect when they choose Pullman Regional Hospital. We do what we do because we want to elevate the health of our communities and be open and accessible to everyone as a community hospital. Our patients are our children's teachers, our neighbors, our mail carriers; this is our community to serve.

As we continue to work towards simplifying the healthcare experience for our patients and providing transparency in pricing we too seek simplification in keeping up with changing regulations for pricing transparency and look forward to working together on these goals.