

# Sheriff brings in a doctor

## Jail goes with a new health care company

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The Grant County Sheriff's Department is using a new health company — which officials say will save taxpayers money — to take care of inmates' medical problems.

Sheriff Darrell Himelick said the department has a one-year contract with Health Professionals Ltd., which is based in Illinois. The company started working for the jail April 1. Before, the department had a nurse practitioner who worked part-time. Though Himelick said she did an excellent job, Health Professionals has a doctor who comes to see the inmates three or four times a week, and he is on-call at all times.

"The biggest thing was I needed a doctor in place," Himelick said.

The department has been sued over inmate health care in the past, the sheriff said.

"They bring a lot of liability insurance with them," Himelick said about the company. "They'll help us defend those lawsuits if they happen."

Attorney Michael Morow, who has defended the sheriff's department in lawsuits, said courts are often interested in knowing who has reviewed a case and what credentials that person has.

"If you have a medical doctor review an issue, it's a factor a court will consider," he said. "... They usually don't question the judgment of a medical doctor."

Sheriff's Capt. Kevin Pauley said having a doctor evaluate inmates is better than having a nurse practitioner. The doctor from Health Professionals is experienced with working with correctional facilities, he said.

"He's experienced in how to (coordinate) medical issues in a jail setting, and that was really needed here in Grant County," Pauley said.

The addition of the health company has brought many other changes to the jail. Inmates aren't given methadone anymore.

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Himelick said he never agreed with methadone treatments because it can lead to more drugs on the streets — some people were getting arrested so they could get the drug in jail.

“I didn’t feel it was needed, but I couldn’t make that call,” the sheriff said. “I never have agreed with it. I’ve always said that methadone in Marion, Ind., is part of the problem, not part of the solution.”

Himelick said the department spent \$3,000 in 2008 on

methadone.

Health Professionals now gives inmates prescription medicine to help with withdrawal symptoms.

“It seems to be working fine,” he said. “I actually went in to see the inmates and how they’re getting along.”

Himelick said he hopes to save taxpayers \$30,000 a year, but the savings will depend on how many inmates are in the jail over the course of the year. The inmates still will go to Marion General Hospital and Cornerstone Behavioral Health for medical issues, which is a separate bill.

“If I can save \$1 of taxpayers’ money, (I will.) ... The county’s not a bottomless pit of money,” he said.

Morow said Grant County

is part of a trend — more and more sheriffs are hiring health companies to come into their jails. The professional companies provide a stable, systematic way of treating inmates, he said. Most sheriffs seem to be in favor of having a health care company, he said.

Himelick has been impressed with the company so far, and said the staff from Health Professionals gives the inmates what they need and no more.

“They’ve got a good reputation with the facilities they’re in,” he said. “I was really impressed with the doctor when he came in.”