

Wyoming woman shined light on false Medicare claims

Whistleblower shows us the way

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A recent federal court action affecting Wyoming is a shining example of how the judicial system worked properly to protect the integrity of a vital government health program.

Last week Banner Health Systems agreed to pay the federal government \$6.1 million to settle allegations that its Wyoming facilities submitted false Medicare claims for home health visits. A Worland woman acting as a whistleblower, Debbie Evans, received \$1 million of the settlement.

Evans was fired by Washakie Memorial Hospital, which had been managed by Banner's predecessor, Lutheran Health Systems. She claimed her termination was due to her refusal to participate in filing fraudulent Medicare claims.

The federal government, siding with Evans, later joined the lawsuit against Banner for filing claims it determined were unreasonable and unnecessary. The settlement announced last week is believed to be the largest Medicare recovery by the United States in Wyoming.

The work by the Department of Justice in this case is commendable and demonstrates a commitment to hold health care providers fully accountable for their actions when it comes to spending federal dollars.

But the real hero of this story is Evans, who chose not to accept a dismissal she didn't deserve. She and her attorney, Michael Shickich of Casper, decided to take on a flawed health care reimbursement system despite incredible odds against them, not the least of which was money. Banner, a nonprofit company with \$2.2 billion in assets and \$2.1 billion in annual revenues, was a comparative Goliath.

It isn't always easy to do the right thing. The legal system is so complex many people who feel they have been unfairly treated simply give up because they do not possess the time and energy it takes to fight back.

Evans fought back for herself and, more importantly, called attention to a larger problem that should concern us all. Wyoming's newest millionaire deserves a pat on the back for her efforts.