

Mathews Soft on Medicaid Abuses

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

As one of his first acts as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, David Mathews indulged in a little civil disobedience.

He is required by law to reduce federal Medicaid funds to states that do not review how the money is spent. The reviews are crucial to insure that hospitals, nursing homes and mental institutions are giving proper care and are not bilking patients or the government.

Yet Mathews has told Congress that, despite the law, he won't reduce Medicaid funds at this time. He contends that the states are unable to police the medical ripoffs and that any Medicaid cutbacks would have the effect of crippling the system.

Unscrupulous doctors and hospitals, meanwhile, are squeezing Medicaid money out of the government by hospitalizing patients, prescribing medicines and performing operations without medical justification.

Rep. John E. Moss (D-Calif.) turned up evidence, for example, that \$300 million in Medicaid funds had been paid for unnecessary surgeries. Other pa-

tients have received inferior care from doctors who are more interested in their Medicaid eligibility than their health.

Yet Mathews is continuing to mail Medicaid checks, despite evidence that the states are not keeping a proper watch on abuses and, therefore, are not complying with the law. From HEW files, here are a few typical, confidential findings:

- In Colorado, HEW investigators found that "no physician or psychiatrist" serves on the mental health team, which is supposed to check on the treatment of Medicaid patients.

- In Rhode Island, federal inspectors were appalled to discover that one hospital had not complied with 61 of 67 required records. Doctors were far behind on visits to Medicaid patients.

- In Indiana, many nursing homes weren't even asked by the state to conduct the reviews that are required by law.

- In Ohio, "no medical reviews in mental hospitals have been done," according to a confidential report.

- And, in Wisconsin, reviews on nursing homes have been "inconsistent due to a shortage of MDs in rural areas and lack of cooperation in urban areas."

Poison Plot—Our investigation of the secret use of poisons by the intelligence community has turned up a bizarre plot to poison the North Korean general staff during the Korean War.

An urgent, secret requisition was issued for an "odorless, tasteless" poison that was supposed to be slipped into the food of the North Korean high command in Pyongyang.

Their exclusive mess hall was shared by Chinese and Soviet advisers who also would have been poisoned.

The plot was concocted in the early 1950s, when American soldiers were dying in Korea. Its originator, Maj. William Burke, now a major general, was chief of guerrilla activity at "Leopard Base," a hideaway headquarters on Paengnyong-do Island.

He supervised teams of Korean infiltrators who, using the code names "Donkey" and "Wolfpack," operated deep inside North Korea. One day, they reported that they had planted an agent in the mess hall of the top enemy command.

The enterprising major saw this as an opportunity to eliminate North Korea's military leadership in one operation. He dispatched a top-secret message to the Eight Army in South

Korea, requesting poison for the project.

The request was rejected. Apparently, no effective, undetectable poisons were available. The U.S. command also feared poison reprisals against its officers and howls from Moscow over the sudden demise of Soviet advisers.

Burke accepted the verdict. But a few weeks later, as a spoof, he requested a large amount of rat poison, claiming rats were eating his supplies. The Eighth Army, suspected that Burke's "rats" were North Korean officers, turned him down again.

Footnote: As long ago as November, 1970, we wrote about the deadly poisons that are now making headlines. We reported that the Weathermen, a radical group, was trying to steal some poisons to contaminate U.S. water supplies.

We quoted from confidential investigative reports, which alleged that the Weathermen hoped "to incapacitate a population by infection for seven to 10 days."

This points up the possibility that poisons, developed by the United States, could fall into hostile hands and be used against the United States.

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