

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Billing Company Used by Plessen Healthcare Sends Exorbitant Covid-19 Vaccination Bills to Residents. Those Bills Are Erroneous, Plessen Says.

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Staff Consortium **February 20, 2021**

Patient Name		RHEA DOWLING		Insurance 1: CIGNA HEALTHCARE/182223		Insurance 2: None on file		
Service Date	Invoice Number	Description of Service	Total Charges	Insurance Payments	Insurance Adjustments	Patient Payments	Insurance Pending	AMOUNT YOU OWE
01/14/2021	6016	Medical Services	\$ 541.00	-\$ 200.00	-\$ 200.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 71.00	\$ 70.00

Patient Name		RHEA DOWLING		Insurance 1: CIGNA HEALTHCARE/182223		Insurance 2: None on file		
Service Date	Invoice Number	Description of Service	Total Charges	Insurance Payments	Insurance Adjustments	Patient Payments	Insurance Pending	AMOUNT YOU OWE
12/24/2020	4656	Medical Services	\$ 606.00	-\$ 240.00	-\$ 240.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 71.00	\$ 55.00

Copy of bill totaling \$1,147 mailed to Rhea Dowling, who had taken Covid-19 vaccination shots with Plessen Healthcare. By. RHEA DOWLING

Plessen Healthcare, one of the firms that have partnered with the V.I. Dept. of Health in the government's Covid-19 vaccination drive, said Friday that 110 individuals — some with health insurance and others without — were mailed claims tied to the administration of the vaccine, including one totaling \$1,147.

Those claims were erroneous, said Plessen Healthcare CEO Dr. Jan Tawakol, in a release the company issued. He explained that Plessen Healthcare and sister firm Urgent Care, lost two billing employees in Sept., 2020, during Urgent Care's opening. "Due to staffing shortages and difficulty in filling these positions in-house, they were forced to outsource the billing for the Urgent Care," Plessen said.

When Urgent Care started administering vaccinations in December, the billing was being managed by the outsourced firm, which Plessen said was "totally automated and that the medical record system produced claims and submitted them without any human interaction. Due to the lack of oversight, their system mailed approximately 110 claims to patients, including some with insurance."

The V.I. Dept. of Health has emphasized that no one should be charged for Covid-19 vaccines. "According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), vaccine doses purchased by United States taxpayer dollars will be given to the American people at no cost," [said](#) Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. "However, vaccination providers can charge an administration fee for giving someone the shot. Vaccination providers can be reimbursed for this by the patient's public or private insurance company or for uninsured patients by the Health, Resources and Services Administrator Provider Relief Fund. No one can be denied a vaccine if they're unable to pay the vaccine administration fee."

Rhea Dowling, one of the persons who received a bill, spoke to the Consortium about the matter and expressed frustration. She also shared the bill and said she wanted residents to know what was going on. Ms. Dowling subsequently called Plessen about the issue, and the company managed to allay her concerns.

Senator Kurt Vialet, who was aware of the situation, called on Plessen to issue a notice to the public immediately. Mr. Vialet said even a billing error, in such difficult times, could be stressful to Virgin Islanders.

Said Plessen in its release, "Although it is standard practice for billing companies to use 'standard fees' when no fee has yet been established by the insurance companies, claims are then normally adjusted down to the correct patient responsibility as provided by the insurance company. In the case of the Covid-19 vaccine administration, this should have resulted in a zero balance without any charge whatsoever to the vaccine recipient. However, the billing company system failed to adjust the claims and proceeded to send out statements."

Dr. Tawakol said he realized what was occurring when his own wife received a bill. "There was no explanation whatsoever. I immediately contacted the billing company and the CEO explained that there was a glitch in their system; they made a mistake. He apologized and stated that corrected statements with zero balances would immediately be mailed," he said.

Following the faux pas, Dr. Tawakol immediately requested that the billing company halt all claim submissions and send out new statements reflecting a zero balance to all individuals that had received the incorrect statements. He also directed the firm to refund all payments received, according to the release.

Plessen said it has notified D.O.H. of the matter and emailed all patients as well. Additionally, Plessen said it has since taken back the vaccine administration billing from the stateside company and brought it back in-house under a different medical record and billing system, in an effort to "gain immediate control over the situation."

The company said it continues to encourage anyone who has received a bill in error to reach out. Additionally, those who have paid for services related to the vaccination, or have questions or concerns should contact Angela East, Plessen public relations liaison, at (340) 201-3157.