



JUSTIN
McLACHLAN

Health care at WVU a hurdle for students

I WAS HAVING A GREAT DAY, until I opened my mail.

A collection agency wanted money. The letter said I owed WVU Hospitals \$180 and it was time to pay.

I'd only put off setting the bill because no one at the hospital had a clear idea what it was for. But the letter was enough to motivate me, and after a few more phone calls, I pinned down the culprit: Student Health Services. The bill was for a test they'd ordered back in October. But at the time, the student physician assistant who saw me said the test and a follow-up visit to discuss the results would all be covered by a \$10 co-pay.

She was wrong, very wrong.

The bill is "correct" and despite the error on the part of student health (or "miscommunication," as they put it), they said the bill stands and I'm responsible for it.

Turns out, I'm not alone. The litany of complaints WVU students have about the health service is long. The university recently embarked on a public relations campaign to promote changes in the service's operations, but despite their honest efforts to make things better, issues like mine persist.

Enter Dr. Jan Palmer, director of Student Health Services. I sent him an e-mail detailing my experiences over the past year and posed a few simple questions about how student complaints are handled. Within a few minutes, he replied and asked me to come to his office to talk.

We sat down the next day and I wondered aloud that if I didn't write this column, would I have been granted a one-on-one meeting with the director? He assured me, though, that he'd take the time to talk with or help any student who contacted him and I wasn't getting special treatment.

I can't say I walked away from the meeting with everything resolved, or a solid belief that patient education is a top priority for the service's staff. After all, I was very clearly told something wrong — to the tune of \$180 — and they're not willing to admit that it was a mistake they should be responsible for.

As students bound to use their services, we have the right to be clearly informed, in lay terms, when recommended tests are going to cost us more money. The health service says as much in their "patient bill of rights," so why that didn't happen in my situation and why Palmer isn't willing to take responsibility for their failure are still questions. It's just simply the right thing to do.

On the other hand, I do think student health is on a good road, even if there are a few potholes like this one. Palmer and his staff did take the time to work out some of my other issues.

I only wish someone would've explained it the way he did before a collection agency started hunting me. And I hope that I'll be the last student at WVU to ever have a \$10 test turn into a \$180 surprise in the mail.

JUSTIN McLACHLAN is a graduate journalism student at WVU. He can be reached at campuslife@dominionpost.com.



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Will anyone use bridge to cross University Ave.?

JUSTIN McLACHLAN is the new Campus Buzz columnist. His column will appear every Sunday.

CONSTRUCTION HAS STARTED on a \$1.7 million, downtown pedestrian bridge across University Avenue that the school says will be completed in time for the fall 2007 semester.

The bridge should make it not only safer to cross University Avenue (some 1,000 people an hour do during the school year), but ease traffic congestion in front of the Mountainlair and Woodburn Circle. But one has to wonder — if they build it, will anyone use it?

The bridge is being constructed in an out-of-the-way location that currently not many use to cross the street; it's certainly the path less traveled. Those in Woodburn Circle or any of the lower parts of the campus will have to walk out of their way, up to the College of Business and Economics, just to use the bridge to get to the Mountainlair. Sure, the location will be convenient for some, but most students don't swim upstream. We all take the shortest path, and I think the university will find that the sky bridge isn't on the map for most people.

Take, for example, those of us who have to park at the Coliseum and take the PRT downtown.

There are crosswalks at the intersection in front of the Coliseum, complete with stoplights. Yet every one of us still risks our life by crossing where the sidewalk ends, all to save about five minutes of walking time. What makes anyone think that we won't do the same on University Avenue, a street where cars actually stop for pedestrians?

Obviously, a solution is needed. Driving through the downtown campus during the school year is miserable, mostly because of the stop-and-go traffic in front of the Mountainlair. Out of frustration, drivers often try to whiz by as fast as they can to avoid stopping for pedestrians. That makes for a deadly mix when those crossing assume cars will obey the crosswalk signs posted on the street.

The university might have a good reason for building the bridge far out of everyone's way. I've heard that clearance for trucks was an issue, as the bridge is going up right where University Avenue dips down, thus providing a lot of extra space. But really, would it have been a huge stretch to get the city to limit big trucks to Beechurst Avenue Avenue? Do a lot of big trucks use University in the first place? It is a winding road up a mountainside, after all.

Hopefully, the administration has planned a way to force, or at least, strongly encourage pedestrians to use the bridge once it's completed, or we might be embarking on a nearly \$2 million mistake that solves no problems.

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