

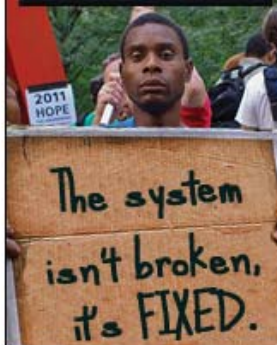
The media's job is to interest the public in the public interest.

- John Dewey



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Many Virginia Hospitals Offer Free & Discounted Health Services

April 20, 2012

RICHMOND, Va. - Medical costs remain the nation's No. 1 cause of bankruptcies, and for many of Virginia's poorest people, health issues take a back burner to essentials such as food and shelter. However, an attorney with Virginia Poverty Law Center says more help is available than some people realize.

Jill Hanken says many hospitals in Virginia offer free or discounted medical services for people who qualify.

"It varies from hospital to hospital. Some limit their charity care to only emergencies, others will have limitations. For example, they won't cover cosmetic surgery. They won't cover planned stays."

Hanken says those in need of a specific type of service should compare hospitals.

"To try and find out as much as they can ahead of time, there's a good online service called **Virginia Health Information** that will provide information about various charges for similar procedures with different hospitals."

Hospitals now are required by law to publicize their charity-care policies, Hanken says, either on their website or in the hospital. They don't always do that, she says, so people should check with the billing department.

The Virginia Poverty Law Center provides a list of hospitals in Virginia, along with links to their financial assistance policies, on their website at vplc.org. The **Virginia Health Information** website is vhi.org.

Monique Coppola, Public News Service - VA

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