

EXCLUSIVE: Waukesha Mental Health Hospital Has Not Been At Capacity Any Time In Two Years
By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

The small 16-bed mental health hospital operated by Waukesha County has not been at 100 percent occupancy for even a single day in the last two years. The daily census of population at the facility was obtained through an open records request made by a Waukesha resident and supplied to me.

Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow has defended the county's continuing operation of the hospital even as he and county officials say they need to create a county sales tax because there is nothing left in the county budget to cut. Farrow isn't looking very hard. It is very rare for a Wisconsin county to operate its own mental health hospital and most counties simply outsource the service to private providers. There are several mental health facilities in the region.

The data provided in response to the records request dates back to January 1 of 2023 and runs through the end of September this year. There wasn't a single day in that nearly two year period in which all 16 patient rooms were occupied. In fact, on roughly half the days in the two-year period, the patient count was below ten.

There were two days in August of this year in which only three patients were in the hospital. But there were lots of county-paid staff on duty. The hospital is fully staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There is always a nursing supervisor on duty along with individual nurses and nursing assistants. The facility has an administrative staff has doctors assigned.

While the sparsely populated mental health facility is packed with staff, Waukesha County has closed its Huber jail and the sheriff's department is reportedly understaffed. The district attorney's office is many employees short of what it needs, according to DA Sue Opper. County Executive Farrow proposed a 0.5 percent county sales tax even though he acknowledged the county doesn't need the full amount to fund its services. The proposal was withdrawn after enormous opposition. It is, however, still under consideration. County officials are hoping the legislature allows it to create a sales tax at less than 0.5 percent.

Sources at the mental health hospital tell me that at many times half the patients are not even residents of Waukesha County with many coming from Milwaukee.

Farrow and county board members say they have nothing left to cut in county services. Perhaps they should check the meager patient counts and high staffing levels at their mental health hospital.

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