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Letter to the Editor, State Port Pilot re MRI CON

Did you know that Doshier is the only Critical Access Hospital (25 beds or fewer) in North Carolina that is not owned or managed by a large system? Because we don't have a huge budget or offer mega-services, successfully leading a small, independent hospital like Doshier is all about the details.

And one of the details we have been paying close attention to this year is magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). This is essential equipment physicians use to diagnose patients and determine proper treatment modalities. Doshier has leased MRI equipment—now housed at Doshier Plaza on Long Beach Road—for more than 20 years from a for-profit company in California. Even though a new MRI scanner costs about \$1.8 million, Doshier could literally save millions of dollars over a five-year period by purchasing a new scanner instead of leasing. So why don't we just buy one and eliminate the middle man? Welcome to the challenging but necessary world of medical economics.

Many of you may not be aware that healthcare spending is regulated by the State of North Carolina through a mechanism called Certificate of Need (CON). Here's the explanation from the state's website, "The fundamental premise of the CON law is that increasing health care costs may be controlled by governmental restrictions on the unnecessary duplication of medical facilities."

The governor appoints a State Health Coordinating Council composed of 24 members from various constituencies in North Carolina that has the authority to approve or deny medical expenditures. Providers must have the Council's approval or they are prohibited from making the expenditure. While the CON law offers many advantages to patients, providers and insurers, the application process is complicated and time-consuming. However, the Doshier Board of Trustees knows the benefits to owning a MRI go beyond merely financial savings to the hospital. Consider the following advantages to our patients:

- Safer care by locating the new MRI on the hospital's campus that is actually connected to the hospital.
- Better care through state-of-the-art technology.
- Less expensive care to our patients and governmental insurers--we project savings of \$129 per patient.

The Council held six open hearings in different cities throughout North Carolina during the month of July. At each one we presented Doshier's justification for requesting an exemption. On September 16, 2015, the Technology Sub-committee for the Council voted to approve our petition. The sub-committee's recommendation for approval now goes to the full Council for a vote in October. Should the Council approve our petition, we could have the new equipment up and running at the hospital by June 2016.

Today's world of healthcare is challenging for every hospital in North Carolina, but the path is particularly steep for rural community hospitals like Doshier. We believe that by paying attention to the details – we can ensure Doshier will continue to provide top quality care and service to our patients.

Tom Siemers

President & CEO