

THE 570 NETWORK | THE 570 | BIZ | CALENDAR | CARS | CLASSIFIEDS | HOMES | JOBS | DIRECTORY | SUBSCRIBE TO PRINT | NEWSLETTERS & ALERTS

newsitem.com

Enter a search term... Search

Enter a search term... Search

HOME NEWS SPORTS OPINION ARTS & LIVING CLASSIFIEDS CUSTOMER SERVICE

2013 INAUGURATION | BUSINESS | COURTS/POLICE | OBITUARIES | YOUTH & SCHOOL | ANTHRACITE OUTDOOR ADVENTURE AREA

**THE 2013 Nissan SENTRA®**

**\$15,990** Starting MSRP  
**\$500** INMAC CASH  
**\$15,490** NET VALUE after incentive

SHOP NOW >

**NISSAN NOW**

**NISSAN SHIFT**

As low as \$15,990 (more)

## Local allegations not only ones for PrimeCare

BY JUSTIN STRAWSER (STAFF WRITER JUSTIN\_S@NEWSITEM.COM)

Published: March 28, 2013

Subscribe online for just 99 cents!

### ARTICLE TOOLS

FONT SIZE: [A] [A] [A]

SHARE 0

OUR SOCIAL NETWORKS

FACEBOOK Recommend

SIGN UP NEWSLETTER

SUNBURY - PrimeCare Medical Inc., recently accused by two former employees of not properly treating inmates at Northumberland County Prison (NCP), is no stranger to such allegations.

They are similar to what Somerset County Commissioner Joe Betta claims has been happening at the county jail in that southwestern Pennsylvania county, where an investigation is taking place.

"It sounds like the same place, just in a different part of the state," Betta said last week when told of the allegations involving NCP.

Also, in 2006, The Morning Call of Allentown published an extensive investigative article entitled "Is Quality of Prison Health Care in Jeopardy?" that includes details of a number of lawsuits involving PrimeCare, including 16 in Northampton County alone.

In Northumberland County, the commissioners and PrimeCare administration acknowledged last week the company would be investigating the allegations, which were initially made anonymously by two former employees to The Daily Item. The News-Item confirmed the names of the two workers; one had been fired and one resigned citing the allegations.

They claimed in their interview with The Daily Item that inmates were not treated in a timely manner; that medicines would run out and inmates would have to wait up to a week for refills; that medical records and charges included untrue statements to make the provider look more professional than it was, and that documented reports of inadequate treatment or misconduct by supervisors were ignored.

Commissioner Chairman Vinny Clausi said Tuesday he was unaware of the details of the Somerset accusations, but that Betta has attempted to contact him recently.

PrimeCare, based in Harrisburg, has defended its reputation and is expected to have a report on its findings at the prison board meeting Wednesday, said Clausi, who said he's resisting temptation to speak further until he has more evidence.

### Somerset trouble

PrimeCare has been providing medical services to Somerset County since 2004. The latest three-year \$500,000 annual contract ended Dec. 31, and the commissioners and PrimeCare agreed to operate on a month-to-month contract until the investigation ends.

Somerset County Jail has capacity for approximately 100 inmates and has at least 40 employees. PrimeCare employs four full-time nurses, a supervisor and several nurses at the prison.

Betta, who has been approached by former and current prison employees and former and current employees of PrimeCare who worked at the jail, was instructed by his own board of commissioners, district attorney and president judge to turn over the testimonies to Somerset Borough Police.

Betta said he was first approached by a former PrimeCare employee in October about the alleged mistreatment of inmates, but he was not satisfied with the results of an internal investigation by PrimeCare that turned up "no significant findings."

BOOK NOW

FRENCHMAN'S REEF & MORNING STAR RESORT

Marriott

\$40 for Hr Massage, Doctor Consultation & Chiropractic Assessment at Proactive Family Chiropractic!

50%  
\$40 .00

Wilkes-Barre Daily Deals powered by ReferLocal



Submit your recipes  
Click above to submit your recipes.



- Tipped coal truck slams into vehicles, parts store
- Police Blotter: Thursday, March 28, 2013
- Sound Off: Thursday, March 28, 2013

"I acted on it. No one else wants to look into it, so I will," he said. "I passed the word at the jail: if anyone wants to talk about the work atmosphere, talk to me."

And talk they did: he started taking statements from several inmates, five correctional officers and four former nurses about the mistreatment of inmates, a hostile work environment, sexual harassment and falsified records and timesheets, he said.

"I am convinced these are not former disgruntled employees, but they left on their own because they did not want to partake in the falsification of the records and mishandling of narcotics," he said.

Employees told him that they were too scared to talk for fear losing their jobs, he said.

**Nurse speaks out**

A former PrimeCare nurse at Somerset County Jail contacted The News-Item last week and agreed to provide comments on the condition of anonymity. Her former employment status was confirmed by Betta.

"They say we are disgruntled workers. No, we are not. We are honest, caring nurses," she said. "The truth needs to come out. People's lives are at stake." She agreed with Betta, saying the alleged treatment of Northumberland County inmates sounds like the experiences she witnessed.

"My conscience can't carry what's going on. These inmates are human beings," she said.

She cited a lawsuit filed last year by inmate Ronald D. Sever, 48, as an example.

Sever is seeking \$50 million in damages for cruel and unusual punishment for being refused treatment after a noxious spider bite. While Dan Rullo, the Somerset County solicitor, has called Sever's claims "fantasy" in the media, the unidentified nurse said the inmate isn't lying. She said her frequent requests for the man to be taken to the hospital to be treated by a doctor were ignored.

She was told by several prison guards that she was the only one who would do her job at the prison, and that many inmates were shocked when she treated them.

"They (the prisoners) did what they done, and that's no concern of mine, but they have families that love them. They are someone's child or husband," she said.

PrimeCare has "total indifference" to inmates' needs, she said.

Earlier this month, the prison board gave Betta notice to cease and desist his investigation, and the president judge of the county told him he was a "security risk" and could no longer meet with anyone inside the jail. He could, however, meet with anyone outside the facility.

"Never have I encountered a massive determination to stop me from searching for the truth," Betta said. "I don't have a motive yet, but when the police are done with it, we'll know."

PrimeCare is described on its website as a privately owned, nationally accredited, correctional health care company that provides medical services to approximately 18,000 inmates in juvenile correctional facilities, jails and prisons throughout the northeastern U.S., including at least half of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.

PrimeCare officials did not return a request for comment on this report, but Todd Haskins, vice president of operations, when asked about the Northumberland County allegations last week, said the company takes any concerns seriously, but he is not going to "give satisfaction to former employees who were in the facility, running the facility and now they're coming back to make those accusations. I find it hard to believe."

It is never the practice or policy of PrimeCare to do any of these things of which the company is accused, he said.

**State reprimand**

The Morning Call report said many of the lawsuits against PrimeCare were given court approval to move forward, including a \$150,000 settlement with an inmate in 2003. In that case, it was alleged PrimeCare failed to fill prescriptions, gave incorrect prescriptions and delayed prisoners' access to medical care.

In 2004, Lackawanna County replaced PrimeCare as its prison medical provider after a county grand jury characterized medical care there as deficient and determined the company failed to

**JOBS570**

Migrant Education Recruiter  
Greenhouse Project Manager (Sunbury, PA)  
CNAs  
RN Clinical Liaison (Danville, PA)  
Job openings

More top jobs

- **City police: Woman asks cop for dope**  
5 comments · 1 day ago
- **Group supports Bridys call for Second Amendment resolution, but not his fellow Northumberland County commissioners**  
1 comment · 17 hours ago
- **Liquor outcome could end a legacy MASSER RESPONDS TO VOTE**  
8 comments · 2 days ago

**REALESTATE570**

3 Coal Township  
1 Mount Carmel  
2 shamokin  
3 Shamokin

More top homes

- **Tipped coal truck slams into vehicles, parts store**

**CARS570**

Seward Towing 570-441-6287 Seward  
Towing 570-441-6287 Seward Towing 570-441-6287

More top autos

adequately treat inmates for serious medical conditions and failed to report injuries that might have been caused by physical abuse, The Morning Call reported.

In 1997, president and corporate medical director of PrimeCare, Carl A. Hoffman Jr., was issued a formal reprimand by the Pennsylvania Board of Osteopathic Medicine and was ordered to pay a \$500 fine for altering medical records and making "misleading, deceptive, untrue or fraudulent entries" after an inmate died at Camp Hill state prison, according to court documents provided to The News-Item by Ronald G. Ruman, a press secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of State.

The conduct of Hoffman was "subject to disciplinary action, though perhaps minor in contrast to the charges brought, is nevertheless serious because it impugns his integrity and thus the integrity of the entire medical profession," according to court documents.

In county since 2010

PrimeCare was hired by Northumberland County commissioners with a \$550,996 contract in February 2010 to provide comprehensive medical services at the prison beginning April 1, 2010. The county was providing medical services prior to PrimeCare.

The move into contracted services was a result of a federal lawsuit filed by the Lewisburg Prison Project, a nonprofit inmate advocacy group, on behalf of inmates who complained of inadequate health care and unsafe housing conditions.

Commissioner Stephen Bridy said he, too, was not aware of the Somerset issue, but that he knew PrimeCare was involved in lawsuits.

"Until we have all the facts, I can't comment more," he said Tuesday. "I appreciate the relationship we have with them. I am all for doing the right thing. I pray they are doing the right thing. Until I see information that proves otherwise, I don't have any basis not to believe them at this point."

Commissioner Rick Shoch also said he wasn't aware of issues outside the county. He said he would not comment until there is more information available to the county.