

# New BioTech X-ray Service to Lessen Inmate Medical Costs



## Jail Cell

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### **New X-ray Service to Lessen Inmate Medical Costs** By Josh Mitchell, Missourian Staff Writer

To help control inmate medical costs, the county commission approved a new contract for X-ray services.

Inmate medical costs are hard to budget for because they change from year to year, County Auditor Tammy Vemmer said.

"They can really vary," Vemmer said.

For instance, the county spent \$184,964 in 2011 on inmate medical expenses; \$151,895, 2012; and \$128,658 so far this year, according to Vemmer. The county may get some of that money back through co-pays paid by inmates. The inmate co-pay is \$5 for medical visits and \$3 for prescriptions.

Inmate X-rays are one expense the county is trying to better control through a new agreement with Bio-Tech X-ray of St. Louis. This will save the county money, said Capt. David Boehm with the sheriff's office.

The Franklin County Commission approved the contract last week.

It will cost less to perform X-rays in this manner instead of taking inmates to the hospital, Boehm noted.

"With this service the cost is cheaper," Boehm said. "They (Bio-Tech X-ray) come to the county jail."

X-rays performed at the hospital can cost \$400 and up to \$1,400 if the inmate goes to the emergency room, Boehm said. With the new service, X-rays should cost a maximum of \$200, he said.

Sometimes inmates have to be X-rayed to look for drugs they may hide in their body cavities, Boehm noted.

X-rays can also be used to identify health problems inmates may have.

With the new service, X-rays will be electronically sent to a trained professional who can give a response within two to three hours, Boehm said.

"That way we know what we've got, if we have a situation where we need to get an appointment for an orthopedic doctor," Boehm said. "We save money by not going to the emergency room."

However, if ER services are warranted then the inmate will be transported, Boehm added.

The sheriff's office has a responsibility to protect the safety and well-being of the inmates, Boehm said.

In one case, an inmate had numerous items, including an eighth of an ounce of heroin, hidden in his body, Boehm said. Once the inmate got to the hospital, the doctor said the inmate could die if he moved wrong and caused the balloon holding the drugs to burst.

"In our custody that would be our responsibility," Boehm said. "So this is a safety as well as a security issue."

First District Commissioner Tim Brinker asked Boehm how many X-rays the sheriff's office performs on inmates.

Boehm said it could be between two and nine per month.

X-rays could be ordered for issues such as inmates injured in fights or getting mad and punching a wall, Boehm said.

Presiding Commissioner John Griesheimer asked what warrants an X-ray search for contraband.

"I'm assuming not everyone that comes in (to the jail) like a DWI or whatever would be subject to an X-ray," Griesheimer said.

Boehm replied, "We would have a reasonable suspicion that somebody would be carrying something inside their body. We would take that information (and) use it to get an X-ray, and we can use that as probable cause to go forward with a search warrant if necessary to retrieve any type of foreign objects in the body."

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