

Modern Healthcare

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Outliers ASIDES & INSIDES

Beth Israel protest takes to cyberspace

Who needs to picket when you can launch a virtual protest in cyberspace?

Apparently not labor union officials and disgruntled employees at Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, who are charging hospital administrators with everything from worker intimidation to not providing a sufficient amount of charity care to community residents. Those and other accusations are detailed on eyeonbi.org, a Web site created by Service Employees International Union Local 1199 and the local union consortium Area Trades Council.

The Web site, according to SEIU Local 1199 officials, was launched in response to what some say is an ongoing effort by Beth Israel Chief Executive Officer Paul Levy to increase the not-for-profit provider's operating margin at the expense of patients and workers. The site points to a variety of examples, including an accreditation agency's recent citation of the hospital for violating limits on the number of hours residents can work; overcharging patients for emergency room treatment and using intimidation tactics such as threats of dismissal to prevent workers from unionizing.

"There is mounting evidence that this hospital has lost sight of its mission," said SEIU spokesman Jeff Hall. "It's seen in their overbilling of the government and patients, overworking of residents and in a general lack of respect from hospital administrators for the rights of caregivers."

Beth Israel spokeswoman Judy Glasser declined to comment on the Web site and allegations, but in a blog last week, Levy said it was "clear that SEIU is engaged in what is called a 'corporate campaign'—an attempt to harm the reputation of our hospital and denigrate the people working or volunteering here." He added that the campaign's purpose "is to put such enormous pressure on the management and board of directors that we agree to concessions that would make it more likely for the union to be successful when it gets to the point of trying to organize workers in this hospital."