

Leading Massachusetts Physicians Support Free & Fair Union Elections for Hospital Workers

An Open Letter to Massachusetts Hospital CEOs

We are writing to bring your attention to an important issue affecting our healthcare community: hospital employees in Boston are seeking a voice at work to address important issues such as lack of health care coverage for themselves and their families and the absence of basic workplace protections. Addressing these issues together will improve patient care while addressing the needs of hospital employees.

Too many hospital workers cannot live in the neighborhoods where they work and cannot afford healthcare. While health insurance is offered to most full time employees, this benefit is out of reach to low-wage hospital workers. Many work at least two jobs but still cannot afford the out of pocket costs associated with their employers' health plans. According to state data, in fiscal year 2007 more than 12,000 workers and their dependents at 39 Massachusetts hospitals were enrolled in MassHealth and more than 8,000 hospital workers and their dependents relied on free care or the Uncompensated Care Pool to pay for their care. It is unfortunate that these employees work for some of the largest and best known hospitals in the country and are not offered affordable healthcare.

Hospital workers from nursing assistants to respiratory therapists spend a great deal of time at the patients' bedside and have valuable insights to offer about how we can together improve patient care. Health care unions have an impressive record of doing just that in hospitals; creating opportunities for increased cooperation. In an effort to address these issues and improve their and their families' lives, hospital workers in Boston are seeking to form a union.

Unfortunately several hospitals in the Boston area have a long history of intimidating and coercing hospital workers which is why they, 1199/SEIU, the Area Trades Council, and community supporters such as ourselves, are asking hospital administrators to agree to a code of conduct that would ensure Free and Fair Union elections. Healthcare workers should be Free to make up their own minds, Free from management intimidation and coercion, under Fair secret ballot voting conditions. Furthermore, we want assurance that patient care dollars will be used for the purpose for which they are intended and not for waging a hostile campaign against the hospitals' own workers.

We invite our colleagues to add their names to this letter calling on hospital administrators to do the right thing for workers and for our patients by signing a Code of Conduct respecting the right of employees to free and fair union elections. This simple act would be of great help to tens of thousands of our fellow caregivers who need us to stand up for what is right and for the respect and fair treatment that we all expect in our hospitals.

Patricia Downs Berger, MD
Retired Internist, Co-Chair,
Mass-Care

Eric Chivian, MD
Assistant Clinical Professor
of Psychiatry, Harvard
Medical School, Nobel
Laureate

David C. Christiani, MD, MPH, MS
Physician, Massachusetts
General Hospital, Professor
of Medicine, Harvard
Medical School

Charlie Clements, MD
President and CEO,
Unitarian Universalist
Service Committee, Past
President, Physicians for
Human Rights

Phoebe Cushman, MD
Associate Physician,
Internal Medicine, Brigham
& Women's Hospital,
Clinical Instructor, Harvard
Medical School

Leon Eisenberg, MD
Assistant Professor,
Department of Global
Health and Social Medicine,
Harvard Medical School

Mark Eisenberg, MD
MGH-Charlestown
HealthCare Center,
Assistant Professor of
Medicine, Harvard Medical
School

Paul R. Epstein, MD, MPH
Instructor in Medicine,
Harvard Medical School

Jonathan Fine, MD, MPH
Instructor in Medicine,
Founder, Physicians for
Human Rights, Bedside
Advocates

Barbara Gottlieb, MD, MPH
Staff Physician, Brookside
Community Health Center,
Associate Professor,
Harvard Medical School
and Harvard School of
Public Health

John Jewett, MD
Department of Medicine
Beth Israel Deaconess
Medical Center

Lawrence R. Kaplan, MD, MPA
Bridgewater Goddard Park
Medical Group, Signature
Health, Former President
& CEO, MetroWest Medical
Center

David Himmelstein, MD
Associate Professor of
Medicine, Harvard Medical
School

Jay Himmelstein, MD
Professor of Family
Medicine and Community
Health, University of
Massachusetts School of
Medicine

Peter Lang, MD
Department of Cardiology,
Children's Hospital Boston,
Associate Professor of
Pediatrics, Harvard Medical
School

Edward Lowenstein, MD
Harvard Medical School
H. I. Dorr Distinguished
Professor of Anaesthesia
and Professor of Medical
Ethics in the Department of
Social Medicine

Bernard Lown, MD
Harvard School of Public
Health, Nobel Laureate

Robert P. Marlin, MD, PhD
Department of Medicine,
Cambridge Health Alliance

Rachel Mott, MD
Clinical Faculty, Boston
University School of
Medicine, Department of
Family Medicine

Alan Meyers, MD, MPH
Associate Professor
of Pediatrics, Boston
University School of
Medicine

Rachel Nardin, MD
Department of Neurology,
Beth Israel Deaconess
Medical Center, Assistant
Professor of Neurology,
Harvard Medical School

Chris Nauman, MD
Medical Oncology and
Hematology, PC of Brockton

Daniel Oates, MD, MSc
Section of Geriatrics,
Boston Medical Center,
Assistant Professor of
Medicine, Boston University
School of Medicine

Lewis Pepper, MD, MPH
Boston University School of
Public Health

Ruth Potee, MD
Assistant Professor, Boston
University School of
Medicine, Department of
Family Medicine

Eve Rittenberg, MD
Physician, Southern
Jamaica Plain Health
Center, Clinical Instructor,
Harvard Medical School

Alice Rothchild, MD
Physician, Harvard
Vanguard Medical
Associates, Beth Israel
Deaconess Medical
Center, Assistant Professor
Obstetrics, Gynecology
and Reproductive Biology,
Faculty of Medicine,
Harvard University

Matthew Russell, MD, MSc
Associate Professor
of Medicine, Section
of Geriatrics, Boston
University Medical Center

Vikas Saini, MD, FACC
President, Lown
Cardiovascular Research
Foundation

Anthony L. Schlaff, MD, MPH
Associate Clinical Professor
Tufts University School of
Medicine

William Schmitt, MD
MGH-Charlestown
HealthCare Center,
Assistant Professor of
Medicine, Harvard Medical
School

Leo Stolbach, MD
Senior Affiliate in the
Department of Medicine,
University of Massachusetts
School of Medicine

Steffie Woolhandler, MD
Associate Professor of
Medicine, Harvard Medical
School

Marcia Zucker, MD
Department of Medicine,
Massachusetts General
Hospital, Clinical Instructor
in Medicine, Harvard
Medical School

Affiliations are listed for
identification purposes only.

