

For Immediate Release

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Health workers launch “Eye on Beth Israel” project, say hospital veering from mission

New watchdog website links labor, financial and patient concerns at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center hospital

BOSTON, MA –A new website and public information project has been launched by two Massachusetts labor groups representing healthcare workers.

The “Eye on B.I.” public information campaign will utilize a variety of media and grassroots organizing components to reach hospital patients and taxpayers. Those components will include a massive advertising blitz, including signs and mobile billboards, a new interactive website, <http://www.EyeOnBI.org>, and other public outreach activities in the coming days.

It is a project of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East and the Area Trades Council.

Union supporters and community members will join together Friday, October 3rd at 11:30AM at the intersection of Longwood and Brookline Avenues -- and at intersections throughout the Longwood Medical Center area -- to raise awareness about the new website and show their commitment to improving conditions at BIDMC.

We believe that the current administration of Beth Israel Deaconess has lost sight of its original ideals, raising questions as to whether the hospital is failing to put first the needs of its patients, its workers, and Greater Boston communities.

EyeOnBI.org has been created by people who believe in Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center’s mission of “service to community,” treating “patients compassionately,” and fostering a work environment based on “mutual respect and collaboration.” Both the former Beth Israel and Deaconess hospitals have proud histories. Many of us have received loving care at these institutions over the years. Together, these institutions have offered generations of family members both employment and quality care.

However, we also believe that the current administration of Beth Israel Deaconess has lost sight of its original ideals, raising questions as to whether the hospital is failing to put first the needs of its patients, its workers, and Greater Boston communities.

"No margin, no mission," is an expression often used in the non-profit hospital world. However, there are limits, which BIDMC’s increasingly corporate style of medicine trespasses beyond.

Enlightened non-profit hospital leaders also use the converse phrase, "No mission, no purpose."

Unfortunately, there is mounting evidence that BIDMC’s current administration is running the institution as a business above all else, and losing sight of its noble purpose. This is the common thread that ties all these issues together: Beth Israel Deaconess’ corporate style of medicine.

In order to make sure our hospitals are the best possible places to provide and receive care, we must join together in addressing problems and creating effective solutions.

Many Massachusetts hospitals have aspects that need to be improved. Unfortunately, a particularly disturbing pattern has emerged at BIDMC in recent years during the tenure of its current CEO, Paul Levy. The hospital has drifted from its mission, as evidenced by the media and research reports archived within this website. These reports reveal:

- Poor jobs and working conditions;
- Conflicts of interest;
- High healthcare costs;
- Attacks on workers' basic rights;
- Overbilling the government;
- Quality care concerns;
- Shutting down services to communities in need;
- Failing to live up to obligations as a non-profit, tax-exempt institution;
- Offering insufficient levels of charitable care to the uninsured, while maintaining a tax-exempt status as a charitable institution.

Among the most important issues is the hospital administration's treatment of their own caregivers. One out of every six jobs in Boston is a hospital job. This statistic has few if any parallels elsewhere in the United States. Moreover, BIDMC, like other area hospitals, is rapidly expanding beyond its base in Boston's Longwood Medical Area, as it attempts to take a greater share of the local healthcare market. Will its policies push other providers into a race to the bottom?

BIDMC's CEO Paul Levy has argued that hospital workers do not need a union voice, and that criticism of his administration's recent business practices constitutes an attack on the hospital itself.

But who really makes up the institution? Is it just the CEO and the hospital's executive staff, or is "The BIDMC" also the thousands of community members, doctors, hospital workers, and volunteers who have built the institution, and who physically care for the ill every day?

We argue that it is the latter.

We contend that it is productive to the hospital's ongoing problems, so that all of us can work together towards enduring solutions. Among those solutions is ensuring that hospital workers have a free and fair election process to form unions if they so choose, and that resources are not wasted on fear and intimidation campaigns coordinated by hospital executives that violate workers' rights and take the focus away from patient care.

When hospital workers join together as a union, they have the ability to advocate for improved jobs and patient care, to blow the whistle when necessary, to defend fair hospital funding, to pass legislation that protects patients and workers, to stand up for their families, and to ensure the healthcare needs of our Greater Boston communities are being met.

There are other healthcare institutions in the Greater Boston Area following a similar path, making it all the more important that we address individual hospitals, such as BIDMC, as they stray from their mission.

It is our hope that by revealing ongoing systemic problems at BIDMC through this website, we will spur a return to the principles that defined the Beth Israel and the Deaconess at its founding: The ideals of "service to community," "mutual respect and collaboration" in the workplace, and treating "patients compassionately."

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Representing more than 320,000 healthcare workers in New York, Maryland, the District of Columbia and Massachusetts, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East is the largest Local union in the world. Our mission is to achieve affordable, high quality healthcare for all. 1199SEIU is part of the 2 million member Service Employees International Union, the largest and fastest growing union in America.