

Docs' Rx: Free, fair union vote Slam hospitals' actions

By **CHRISTINE McCONVILLE**

Dozens of prominent Boston physicians, including two Nobel Prize winners, have asked Boston-area hospital administrators to let their workers freely vote on unionizing efforts.

In a full-page advertisement in yesterday's Boston Herald, 34 area physicians added their voices to a growing chorus of people who say that hospital workers should be allowed to decide if they want to unionize.

Union officials say hospital administrators have used intimidation tactics to prevent hospital workers from such votes.

Yesterday, the doctors — many of whom are now retired — agreed.

"Several hospitals in the Boston area have a long history of intimidating and coercing hospital workers" when it comes to union drives, the doctors wrote.

Dr. Patricia Downs Berger, a retired internist, said she has asked hospital administrators to allow nursing assistants, respiratory therapists and other care-givers to vote on unionizing, because "the motivation is social justice.

"It's not to get at the hospitals," she said.

"We just want to ensure that workers have a fair shake, because it's the big people at the hospitals, and the insurance companies and pharmaceutical

companies that have the power."

For more than a year, Service Employees International Union District 1199 has waged its very public battle against Boston hospital administrators.

Union organizers say that with unions, health-care workers would have access to better, more affordable health care, and patients would receive better treatment because unions would create a more collaborative environment.

They have accused the hospital administrators of using health-care dollars to squelch the union efforts.

If the union efforts are successful, tens of thousands of Bostonians could be affected, because one of every six Boston jobs is in a hospital setting.

Yesterday's full-page ad delighted the embattled caregivers, said Mike Fadel, SEIU District 1199's executive vice president.

"Caregivers are seeing that the doctors are not just supporting them at work, but publicly as well," he said.

Russ Davis, executive director of Massachusetts Jobs with Justice, which co-sponsored the ad, said the physician's letter sends a new message to hospital administrators.

"It says that not only is the community in general watching you, the medical community is watching you, too," he said.

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