

Health Care Matters
Especially for those who cannot raise their voices
So we must raise ours

No matter where you might go for hospital care, the closings of St. Johns and Mary Immaculate Hospitals affect you. See the Queens Civic Congress February 13, 2009 [post](#). Below find comments and suggested actions. Real issues that need to be addressed include (but are not limited to) replacing the hospital beds, replacing trauma and ER capacity and maintaining 911 service from any lost ambulance runs associated with either hospital. All Queens residents need to be engaged in this cause. The impacts do not stay in the affected communities but extend throughout the borough. - Corey Bearak

Equally as important as keeping the banks open so that present banking ills can be corrected is keeping open the hospitals and then working to correct or replace a dysfunctional hospital administration.

Our priorities must be life...than an easier life...than a better quality of life in that order.

– Ed Kampermann (Juniper Park Civic)

----- Original Message -----

From: Christina Wilkinson

To: Christina Wilkinson

Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2009 9:06 AM

Subject: FW: An Urgent Plea For Help and Sanity in an effort to Save Lives

Dear Friends, Relatives and Honored Senators, and the Honorable Malcolm Smith,

Please, please take five minutes of your important time to read this. YOU NEED TO SEND THIS TO EVERYONE YOU KNOW. It is an urgent plea for help and sanity and it is my hope that it reaches the halls of power so someone sane can do something about this. It's not about politics. It's about 100's of thousands of Americans that need help right now and a small gesture that with proper support can save many lives. It's about every community in America although it focuses on one first because what is happening in that community is just a pen stroke away from happening to you and your constituents.

In Queens NY, Caritas Corp is about to close St John's Hospital on Queens Boulevard opposite Queens Shopping Mall and Mary Immaculate. Two hospitals that treat/save 200,000 patients a year and serve a population of over 2 million residents, many of whom are retired or of an age where they cannot travel to alternative hospitals many miles away.

If these well equipped hospitals were in many other countries they would be considered the finest hospital that country had to offer.

We are about to fund an \$800 billion bailout (that was our national debt once). Much of that bailout, to the best of my knowledge, is being earmarked for “shovel in the ground” projects (project that have been started and are already employing many workers) and “shovel ready” programs (programs that are planned but not yet started). Since we don’t have details as yet it impossible to know what these are for but infrastructure to make it a bit easier to travel, stadiums to improve our entertainment experience, subsidies to increase our earning power, research to better our future would not surprise me.

These hospitals are not shovel in the ground, or shovel ready. **THEY ARE BUILT AND OPERATIONAL AND THEY WILL GO UNUSED IN TWO WEEKS.** The health care providers there have spent their lives saving other people’s lives. They work around the clock tirelessly. **THEY SAVE LIVES DAILY. WILL WE TEAR THESE HOSPITALS DOWN AND HAVE TO REBUILD THEM AGAIN IN BETTER TIMES?**

As a patient in the ER there recently I was given a CT on a state of the art CT scanner. It took 15 seconds. Unbelievable that this expensive machine will not be useful to those in dire need in just two weeks. I walked through empty halls that were once filled with nurses, doctors and medical staff hurrying to save lives...eerie.

And why are they being closed. Because Caritas Corp says they have been running in the RED, **HAVE PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED STATE AID (IN THE MILLIONS) AND THE STATE SAYS THEY NO LONGER CAN CONTINUE SUPPORT.** Surely there must be some creative answer to this problem. Shouldn’t our spending priorities be critical health care, and first responders (firemen and policemen who may need those hospitals in times of emergency)! Then other programs.

I fully understand these very difficult and hard economic times and absolutely understand the dilemma faced by those in charge of our futures. Who to fund? Who not to fund? I understand the State has helped these hospitals in the past. Should they stop now when our country is in crisis?

Any one of the hundreds of health care providers working in those two hospitals, any one of the 200,000 people who they have treated annually and any one of the 2+ million people who may need emergency care some night at 4AM will absolutely tell you that common sense dictates

“If you want to save the patient (our economy) you must stop the bleeding first!”

Don’t close hospitals and put on the streets health care providers who are desperately needed in favor of a better world tomorrow. Those who need these hospitals may not have a tomorrow in that case.

It’s simple common sense.

Our priorities must be life...than an easier life...than a better quality of life in that order.

TO THOSE MEMBERS OF STATE AND LOCAL LEGISLATURES WHO ARE NOT DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THESE ACTIONS AND THEIR CONSITUENTS...PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT IF IT CAN HAPPEN TO AN AREA SO IMPORTANT TO NY STATE AS QUEENS (with a population of 2+ million constituents)...IT'S JUST A PENSTROKE AWAY FROM YOUR COMMUNITY. DON'T CUT OUR LIFE LINES...PLEASE!

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW!

1. PLEASE SEND THIS TO EVERYONE YOU KNOW
2. IF YOU AGREE PLEASE SEND A COPY TO YOUR CONGRESSMAN AND STATE SENATORS (use "reply to all" which will go to every NY State Senator in the cc field of this email) NO MATTER WHERE YOU LIVE.
3. Make suggestions. How about every one of the million people who were treated there in the last 5 years make a donation matched by the State...or what ever works. But get creative and...
4. CALL CALL your local politicians and let them know how you feel and how it will affect your future political decision making process.

WE HAVE 15 DAYS. THEY HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO SHUT DOWN CRITICALLY NEEDED SERVICES LIKE THE EMERGENCY ROOM.

Only a LANDSLIDE of public support will make a difference. Help move this mountain.

LIFE FIRST...THAN THE GOOD LIFE.

Thank you for your time and I sincerely hope this helps those that have helped me as a resident of Queens and NYC...AND SAVE LIVES.

John Copen

Christina Wilkinson
Secretary
Editor, Juniper Berry
Juniper Park Civic Association
(718) 478-1828 (cell)
www.junipercivic.com

On the next page is the Health Department news release forwarded February 18, 2009 to Queens Civic Congress by the Governor's Office:

STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT AWARDS GRANTS TO ENSURE ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES IN QUEENS

Extends contract with 1199 SEIU to Provide Health Worker Job Placements In Response to Financially Troubled Caritas Health System

ALBANY, NY (Feb. 17, 2008) -- State Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D., today announced \$18 million in grants to ensure that residents of Queens continue to have access to essential health care services and provide job placement services to workers displaced as a result of the bankruptcy-related closing of St. John's and Mary Immaculate hospitals, which make up the Caritas Health System.

"These grants will help other health care facilities in the area expand their capacity to absorb the patients previously handled by these two Caritas hospitals and assist workers in finding new employment," said Commissioner Daines.

The grants include \$14.5 million to expand capacity at eight different health care facilities serving the Queens community and the extension of a State Department of Health contract with 1199 SIEU for the Displaced Workers Program that will make up to \$3 million available for job counseling, placement, and workforce retraining for employees being displaced as a result of the two hospital closings.

Additionally, the State Department of Labor is providing assistance to impacted workers through its Rapid Response program, including information on filing for Unemployment Insurance, labor market information, re-employment services, assessment, job and career counseling, information on skills training and other services offered through the One-Stop system. The State Department of Labor staff from the One-Stop Center can also work with laid off workers who have chosen to pursue a training program to upgrade their skills by ensuring that such programs meet requirements under the unemployment insurance law allowing them to continue to collect their unemployment benefits while participating in training.

The State Department of Health has given contingent approval to a closure plan submitted by Caritas Health System, which filed for bankruptcy on February 6 following financial difficulties that extended over many years. Despite over \$55 million in state loans to Caritas, the hospital system was unable to develop a viable plan for continued operation.

In addition to the \$3 million contract extension to 1199 SIEU for health care worker job counseling, placement and worker retraining, the following grants have been awarded:

- \$3.6 million to Health and Hospitals Corporation of New York City (HHC) to expand inpatient capacity and emergency room services at its Elmhurst and Queens Hospital Centers.
- \$4.5 million to Medisys to expand inpatient capacity and emergency room services at its Jamaica and Flushing sites.

- \$3.5 million to North Shore LIJ to expand inpatient capacity and emergency room services at its Forest Hills and Franklin sites.
- \$2.7 million to Wyckoff Medical Center to expand inpatient and emergency room services.
- \$650,000 to the Joseph P. Addabbo Family Health Centers to maintain primary and preventative services at the St. Dominic's Health Care Center.

The State Department of Health has staff on site on a daily basis at both St. John's and Mary Immaculate hospitals to monitor the access and availability of services and ensure an orderly closure of the two facilities over the next several weeks. The State Department of Health is also conducting daily conference calls with the surrounding providers to monitor utilization of their services and ensure capacity at those facilities for emergency and acute care services.

Background

Caritas is a single corporation comprised of two Queens' hospitals -- St John's Hospital (SJH) and Mary Immaculate Hospital (MIH). In the Fall of 2006, Caritas came under the control of Wyckoff Hospital, a Brooklyn hospital located close to the Queens border. The Wyckoff and Caritas hospital corporations were controlled by Brooklyn Queens Health Care Inc (BQHC).

By February 2007, it became clear that BQHC had severe financial problems and would not make payroll without State Department of Health assistance. As part of an initial loan, the State required BQHC to hire consultants to review and make recommendations regarding the operations of BQHC.

The result of this review showed that BQHC was unable to process claims because of difficulties with its conversion to a new billing system. The report also noted that the Caritas hospitals needed a serious investment in capital and that even with this investment it was unclear if the hospitals could be viable for the long term.

The Department of Health (DOH) and the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) agreed to provide additional loans if BQHC hired a chief restructuring officer (CRO) with the power to operate the hospitals. The CRO and a team of staff began fixing the BQHC billing operation and solidifying the clinical care at the Caritas hospitals. At one point, both the CRO and the BQHC board thought it possible that the BQHC operation could be turned around.

By February 2008, it became clear to all parties that the Caritas hospitals were operating at chronic deficits that threatened their very existence and lacked the ability to generate the capital necessary for a self-sustaining system.

Discussions with other hospitals to find a financially stable partner for Caritas have been unsuccessful.

The financial situation at Caritas has continually worsened because of poor physical

plant, declining patient volume, and lack of capital. The board decided it could not accept additional State loans because it had no viable plan to restructure the hospitals to turn them around. The hospitals declared bankruptcy on February 6 and have filed a plan to close both hospitals by February 27. The DOH is working with surrounding hospitals, nursing homes, and clinics to absorb the patients served by Caritas.

Anticipating bankruptcy, the DOH simultaneously began discussions with surrounding health care providers to assure access to care for the Queens community.

On February 13, 2009, DOH notified NSLIJ, HHC, Medisys, Addabbo Family Health Center, and Wyckoff of grant awards to expand access to emergency and primary care services and inpatient hospital services for the communities affected by the closures. The DOH continues to work with these providers in implementing the projects funded by the grants.

The DOH is also working with Caritas on a daily to implement a closure plan for the facilities, with closure set for February 28, 2009. Daily conference calls are conducted to monitor utilization, access and progress of the plan.