

Northeastern Stops Admitting Patients

Contributed by Jerry Silberman
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Fire Rescue ambulances are no longer accepted at the Emergency Room.

In a plush office on Temple's campus, executives are toasting their success in eliminating a "service line" that lost them money. Corporate hatchet man Ed Notebaert achieved the goal that made him worth millions to Ann Weaver Hart and the other decision makers at Temple when they hired him last fall.

Not heard in that office are the pain and loss of hundreds of newly unemployed workers, and thousands of patients and their families who don't know where to turn. Northeastern, the largest employer in Port Richmond, an institution that generations have relied on, is now an empty shell. No longer will nurses be taught in their community to serve their community. The Hospital you can walk to is gone. A few doctor's offices under the guise of an "ambulatory care center" won't fool anyone.

In a supreme act of cynicism, timed to the closing Temple has put up billboards in the service area advertising that their maternity service is "always there".

Despite its dependence on public funding and status as a public institution, Temple's corporate managers proved impervious to the efforts of local elected officials to force it to alter its plans. We appreciate especially the efforts of Representatives John Taylor and Michael O'Brien, and Senators Mike Stack and Lawrence Farnese. The indifference of other elected officials, including Governor Ed Rendell, helped Temple along. Temple's conduct cannot be forgotten, and the question of its accountability is still open.

Unfortunately, Northeastern's story is not unique. Philadelphia prides itself on its medical schools and academic hospitals, including Temple, which provide world-class care for rare diseases and high tech procedures. But it's getting almost impossible to be treated for the less glamorous but no less life disrupting illnesses and injuries we face every day. These are best treated at community hospitals like Northeastern, Germantown, Einstein Southern, Parkview, MCP, and Episcopal to name some others we have lost recently.

The energy and community which came together around Northeastern could just fade out, as each individual worker or family struggles privately to find jobs and health care solutions.

We hope, however that some of that energy and community power will go to work for a real solution to our health care crisis. That solution has to return to the American value that health care is a right, available to all, not only to those who can buy it from a profit-directed industry. What kind of "industry" thrives by calculating how much people can be forced to pay to alleviate their pain? And leaves them in pain if they can't pay?

If we are clear that our goal is to guarantee healthcare for all, rather than guaranteeing profit for the insurance "industry" and the hospital "industry", we will be on the right track to bring access to health care for Americans up to the level taken for granted in other countries. Two good places to start putting that energy are Health Care Now! and Healthcare for All PA .