# Detroit Medical Center begins layoffs

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The day after President Bill Clinton said in his State of the Union address that the poor should have greater access to emergency medical care and closer hospitals, hospital workers and residents in Southeastern Michigan received another blow from the healthcare industry.

The Detroit Medical Center began layoffs Wednesday, planned to continue until Monday, of 753 people and the elimination of all overtime, as well as reductions in hours for 356 workers. In all the reductions will affect 1,109 people, and the cuts in hours are equal to 2,000 full-time positions. Following the announcement last month that it had suffered losses of $100 million, the DMC, which is the largest private employer in the area, had announced it would carry out the layoffs in order to save $60 million.

The DMC cares for one in every five people in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. In the city of Detroit alone it is the largest provider of uncompensated care for approximately 75 percent of the poor and uninsured. The DMC sees more than a million patients a year.

However DMC officials claim that the cuts will not hurt patients. They say the layoffs are required to bring the DMC to proper staffing levels in areas where patient needs have been reduced. Staffing levels are based on national standards for urban, academically-linked centers such as the DMC. DMC interim President David Coats blatantly stated, "We have 2,000 employees too many."

Some staffers and patients disagreed with the DMC official's statement, as the patient-to-staff ratios had already been jeopardized prior to the cuts. One Harper Hospital patient care associate said, "How can one person care for 10 patients? You work your butt off."

Most of the layoffs will come from nonunion, nonmanagement workers ranging from top administrators to secretaries who make up the bulk of the work force. The reductions will be made department by department in order to keep the majority of employees on edge, occurring over a five-day period with as many as 400 workers discharged in a single day.

The affected workers will continue to receive a paycheck plus all benefits for 60 days, including vacation and sick days, and will be placed on a rehiring list for one year. To achieve other savings the DMC will closely review its contracts with physicians.

The DMC expects to employ fewer physicians who are specialists. Out of 2,850, there are 1,714 physicians who are not faculty members. The emphasis will be placed on retaining physicians in three areas: those with ties to the Wayne State University School of Medicine, physicians who are administrators overseeing patient care, and primary physicians such as pediatricians and those in internal medicine.

The financial loss and the recent layoffs by DMC are the worst of any Michigan hospital organization, and more cuts are expected. The DMC is expected to announce at the end of February the closure of either Sinai or Grace hospital in northwest Detroit. The DMC is looking at the possibility of operating one of the hospitals as a clinic. According to DMC officials, northwest Detroit doesn't need two major hospitals that are only a mile apart.

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