

Detroit mayor confirms denial of treatment to “extremely sick” patients: “What they put out is honest”

Kevin Reed
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The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the city of Detroit and surrounding suburbs continued to escalate dramatically on Friday, straining the health care system to the breaking point. Amidst the dramatic escalation of cases, Detroit’s Democratic Party Mayor Mike Duggan endorsed, on national television, the recently released policy of Henry Ford Health System limiting essential medical resources such as ventilators to patients most likely to survive the virus, leaving the most vulnerable patients to die.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) reported that the city of Detroit had 1,075 people with COVID-19 as of 2:00 pm Friday, an increase of 224, or 26, percent from the previous day. Of the state of Michigan’s total of 3,657 confirmed coronavirus cases, 3,038, or 83 percent, are in the Detroit Metropolitan area of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

The number of deaths from COVID-19 in Michigan rose to 92 on Friday, with 23 in Detroit and 77 in the Tri-County area. MDHSS also reported that the average age of the deceased is 68.4 and that two-thirds of them are men.

City health officials provided a chilling depiction of the virus spreading throughout Detroit on Friday, with the publication of a heat map showing the hotspots in neighborhoods where the virus is concentrated. The number of people with the virus in Detroit has grown by a multiple of 23 over the past nine days. There were 48 infected individuals in the city as of March 18.

As the WSWWS reported yesterday, Henry Ford Health System publicly acknowledged its policy of rationing care, stating that only the patients with the “best chance of getting better” were “our first priority.” It added that

due to shortages of supplies and equipment, “Patients who are treated with a ventilator or ICU care may have these treatments stopped if they do not improve over time.”

A spokesman for the hospital system said that the policy has been developed as “part of a larger policy document developed for an absolute worst-case scenario,” and is not an active policy. However, multiple reports by emergency room nurses on social media say that area hospitals are already practicing this “live-or-die” decision-making policy.

Melissa Steiner, an ICU nurse at Beaumont Health, posted a video from her car in which she broke down in tears as she described the COVID unit in her hospital. Steiner explained in her video: “So today was the first day that I’ve worked since our unit was designated the second COVID ICU in my hospital. And I don’t know what the f**k just happened for the past 13 hours. Honestly guys, it felt like I was working in a war zone — completely isolated from my team members, limited resources, limited supplies, limited responses from physicians, because they’re just as overwhelmed as we are dealing with a ton of other stuff.

“So basically I just spent the last 13 hours, like, treating two critically ill COVID patients on the bed, basically by myself. And this is my normal for the next however many months it takes for this virus to die down. I’m already breaking, so for f**k sake people, please take this seriously. This is so bad.”

For the second day in a row, the situation in Detroit was featured on national television news media. On Thursday, CNN asked Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan about the “live-or-die” policy at Henry Ford Health System. Duggan resigned himself to a growth in the

number of Detroit residents who will die by backing up the program as prudent, saying, “Henry Ford is one of America’s great health care systems, and what they put out is honest... Everybody is doing everything we can to stop it, but you would be irresponsible as a health system CEO if you weren’t planning for that eventuality.”

This statement comes as no surprise given Mayor Duggan’s record of subordinating the city’s medical facilities to corporate interests. Before he became mayor of the city in 2014, Duggan was CEO of the public nonprofit Detroit Medical Center (DMC), located near the city’s cultural center and Wayne State University.

Duggan oversaw the sale of DMC in 2010 to Vanguard Health Systems and aggressively attacked the nonprofit model as “killing” health care in Detroit because it had long served as a last resort for the city’s indigent population. Bringing the private equity investment company Blackstone Group to the table, Duggan helped transform the only major public health care complex in Detroit into a facility that would not serve those without health insurance.

Duggan has also been on the front line of the campaign to shut off water service to Detroiters unable to pay their water bills. Since 2014, the city has shut off water to 141,000 city accounts, and last year, 23,000 households had their service disconnected. This basic necessity of life is now more critical to survival than ever in a city overrun by the coronavirus. While scrupulous personal hygiene is essential to staving off the disease, tens of thousands of people cannot wash their hands, bathe, shower or wash their dishes or clothes.

Despite a March 9 promise from Mayor Duggan and Democratic Governor Whitmer that water would be turned back on through the so-called “Coronavirus Water Restart Program,” service has been restored to only 850 households, leaving more than 5,000 homes without water.

It is under conditions of immense poverty, unemployment, low wages and lack of health insurance or access to medical facilities that the overall health of city residents has deteriorated dramatically over the past decade. All of these circumstances are contributing factors in the explosive spread of the coronavirus in Detroit now underway.

In addition to the spike in cases among residents, Michigan Public Radio reported on Friday that there are now 24 confirmed cases of coronavirus among inmates at eight Michigan state prisons and nine cases among corrections officers.

Byron Osborn of the Michigan Corrections Organization, the prison workers’ union, said, “The problem is the ability to actually distance people inside the facility, that’s where the problem lies.” Osborne said that with a staffing shortage in Michigan prisons, the spread of COVID-19 is going to make matters much worse. He warned that a “tidal wave” of infected inmates is coming.

Dr. Homer Venters, an epidemiologist at the New York University College of Global Public Health and the former chief medical officer for the New York jail system, told Michigan Public Radio: “I think that most of our governors and our policy makers and certainly the CDC haven’t yet contemplated how horrific it’s going to be in terms of people dying who don’t need to die.

“The primary thing is to get these facilities less crowded, and particularly less full of people who have the risk factors for serious illness and death.”

Venters added that state prisons are not prepared to move large numbers of very sick inmates to outside hospitals, and the hospitals are not prepared for such an influx. He said, “What you do is you create a really toxic atmosphere that can quickly turn violent.”



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