

Nurse fired by Detroit Sinai-Grace Hospital for refusing to work in unsafe conditions

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12 May 2020

On Wednesday, May 6, Sal Hadwan, a nurse at Sinai-Grace Hospital in Detroit, was fired for speaking out against understaffing and unsafe working conditions at the hospital during the coronavirus health crisis that has so far claimed the lives of 1,184 city residents.

Hadwan posted a Facebook video of himself while being walked out of the hospital and showed a copy of his termination letter that alleged he leaked a photo of bodies stored in vacant hospital rooms to CNN.

“Everybody knows I didn’t do it; I didn’t take the photo.” He says in the video, “I feel like I got retaliated against because I stood up and spoke up for what is right. ... They fired me during the pandemic from a place I loved working at.”

He also said the hospital human resources department did not provide any details or proof of an investigation into the leak. “HR didn’t want to explain nothing, but they decided to terminate me because they think I leaked the photos to CNN.”

On Sunday, April 5, Hadwan and six other nurses were sent home after refusing to work under unsafe conditions at Sinai-Grace Hospital, one of six facilities operated by Detroit Medical Center (DMC), a property of Tenet Healthcare. At that time, he livestreamed the group of nurses leaving the hospital to his Facebook page that went viral and made national news, exposing the dire conditions nurses are forced to work under during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the pandemic rips through the global population, medical professionals are being victimized for speaking out against terrible working conditions that are putting their lives and the lives of their patients at risk. In addition to battling the virus, nurses are fighting against hospital owners and administrations that are indifferent or downright hostile to their workers.

“I feel that DMC and Tenet let Sal go because he

stood up for his beliefs and the integrity of nursing. They are using him as a scapegoat instead of making conditions better at the hospital,” a Sinai-Grace nurse told the WSWS.

“Tenet’s major concern is not patient care but making money. Why fire Sal? They want to strike fear into the hearts of other nurses from saying anything, especially under conditions where huge cuts are now taking place throughout the industry.”

Stories like Sal’s are repeated across the country. Kenisa Barkai, a Sinai nurse, was fired on March 27 after raising the alarm about a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and critical staff shortages and threatening to organize a union. The official pretext for her firing was as flimsy as the one given to Sal, a 10-second video on Facebook showing her PPE, which the company said violated their social media policy.

“It breaks my heart that it has come to this. I have been a nurse for 11 years. We are in a critical need of nurses right now, and to fire me when I have experience and professionalism is wrong.” She told the *Metro Times*, “My coworkers are in there battling not just for their patients’ lives, but for their own lives. Just knowing I’m not there during this is heartbreaking.”

Justin Howe, a nurse at Hackley Hospital in Muskegon, Michigan, went public about the lack of PPE at his hospital and the administration forcing employees to throw away donated PPE. On May 1, he was fired on spurious grounds.

Dawn Kulach, a nurse from Virtua Voorhees hospital in New Jersey, brought her own PPE to work as she was recovering from pneumonia and the masks provided by the hospital were not sufficient. When she refused to throw her PPE away, she was fired.

The response of America’s ruling class and its for-profit health system to the pandemic has been marked

by incompetence and callous indifference. Remarkably, in April, 1.4 million jobs were cut in health care. This reserve army of unemployed will be used as a cudgel against health care workers who risk their jobs to speak out for their own safety.

The WSWS has received several reports from health care workers of dangerous working conditions. In addition to fearing infection, they fear being victimized if they are caught speaking out.

A worker at the Henry Ford Healthcare system in Detroit reported being forced to disinfect areas of the hospital without PPE and facing resistance from the administration. “Many of us were outright refused any type of PPE when told to come to a COVID area and clean after patients were discharged,” the worker said. “The director is completely out of control. The supervisors are completely clueless, and no one is being held responsible.”

A nurse in Long Island, New York, reported being given one gown per shift, even when treating patients with and without COVID. They were directed to spray their gowns with Virex between patients to disinfect, which caused chemical burns on the nurses’ hands, arms and eyes. They later found Virex is a pesticide, not to be used on humans or animals.

“I’ve yet to see anyone from administration go into a patient room during this crisis. Supervisors don’t even wear scrubs for their shift,” she reported to the WSWS. “We’ll continue to wear garbage bags over our scrubs and isolation gowns until that runs out. Someone started a GoFundMe page to raise funds for additional PPE but were told to take it down by administration.”

A nurse at a Tenet hospital in Arizona who was victimized by her administration spoke with the WSWS. “Health care should not be run by people making six-figure incomes in the private sector that don’t give two shits about us. I think we should have a nationwide strike. I think health care should leave the hands of assholes getting \$1.25 million in bonuses annually for killing us on the front lines.”

She added, “I wanted to help people, but I have come to hate my job. I hate hospital administrators, I hate the machine, I hate the red tape, bureaucracy, and the disgusting way we are offered up as lambs to slaughter and tossed aside for speaking up for ourselves and our patients.”

The fate of Sal Hadwan and others should be a

warning to health care professionals everywhere. The ruling class is abandoning any serious coordinated effort to fight the pandemic, even as the number of cases continues to rise rapidly and states are forcing people back into the workplace.

The owners and administrators of the US health care system are more concerned with profits, executive salaries and public image and will fire any worker who tries to bring attention to the deadly conditions in their hospitals.

The *World Socialist Web Site* encourages health care workers who would like to share their story to contact us today.



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