

Thousands of US medical workers join protests against police violence

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Thousands of health care workers have joined the protests against police violence that have swept the United States and other countries in recent days.

This weekend, videos showed hundreds of nurses cheering protesters in Manhattan in New York City, and on Tuesday, hundreds again joined a protest in Times Square. Protests have also taken place in Boston, Chicago, and Oakland, California.

On Thursday, the protests expanded significantly, with thousands of medical workers staging demonstrations under the banner “White Coats for Black Lives” in cities across the country. The protests have continued to grow despite the violent police crackdown, which has rapidly escalated this week with Trump’s moves to deploy the military and establish a presidential dictatorship.

At Stanford, one of the leading medical schools in the world, hundreds of medical students and workers joined a demonstration in which they knelt down for eight minutes and 46 seconds, the time that Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd’s neck. Nearly 1,000 health care workers joined a protest at Indiana University’s medical school, and hundreds joined protests in Chicago, Illinois, and the surrounding area, as well as in Miami.

Protests also continued to take place at several New York City hospitals, including Jacobi Medical Center, Montefiore Medical Center, Lincoln Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital. All of these hospitals serve overwhelmingly poor and multi-ethnic, working class communities. Left without proper personal protective equipment (PPE), their staff have battled for months against the coronavirus pandemic which hit New York particularly hard, resulting in over 30,000 deaths.

Many more protests are planned for Friday and Saturday, including in Ohio, Colorado and

Pennsylvania. Like the protest movement as a whole, the demonstrations by medical workers have been multi-racial and multi-ethnic, encompassing a wide range of generations. They practiced social distancing and wore masks.

Medical workers have also directly joined the ongoing protests and have been targeted by police, in blatantly illegal actions.

On Wednesday night, police in Austin, Texas, deliberately shot medical workers with rubber bullets who were trying to treat Justin Howell, a 20-year-old. Howell, who was shot in the head with rubber bullets, is still in critical condition and has suffered brain damage. One of the medics who was shot in the hand later reported, “Just so you know, I had been there two full days. With one of my firefighter shirts on that I sewed a huge red and white medical cross on the front and back on. I had red and white crosses taped on my helmet. They knew I was a medic.”

Earlier this week, Rayne Dominic Valentine, a medical worker with Brooklyn Hospital who has stacked bodies of COVID-19 victims, was brutally assaulted by police when walking home. As he was filming an attack by police on protesters, he was himself assaulted by police officers who kicked and beat him so badly that his head cracked and required staples in the hospital. A GoFundMe page for Valentine quickly gathered over \$13,000, more than 10 times the requested amount. Many of those who donated were fellow medical workers.

One worker commented on the fund page, “I work at Kings County. We have fought COVID19 together and I will fight alongside you against this terrible injustice. Thank you for all that you have done.”

A scientific worker from Pittsburgh wrote, “I am SO sorry this happened! I am a scientist working on

COVID-19 treatments to help those severely ill and prevent them from dying. I had THIS EXACT fear in Pittsburgh. I have to break curfews here because I work the night shifts to process the blood we get from the doctors (who work day shift.) I'm often walking home between midnight and 5am. The bus isn't an option due to Coronavirus. While I'm Caucasian, I still had this fear that cops would shoot first and ask questions later. I'm so sorry this actually happened to you...it is OUTRAGEOUS that police are allowed to do this.”

It is not a coincidence that the mass protests against police violence and racism now find a strong resonance among health care workers, a section of the working class that has been at the forefront of both the social crisis and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anger runs particularly high among doctors and nurses over the tens of thousands of preventable infections and deaths, including at least 291 medical workers who have died because of a lack of PPE. In the US, the richest country in the world, where the government spends hundreds of billions on war and the military every year, over 100,000 people have died from COVID-19, and over 62,000 health care workers have been infected.

After decades of social austerity and devastating cuts to health care, the policy of “malign neglect” has left hospitals—especially in the poorest and hardest areas of the country like the Bronx in New York City—without the medical equipment necessary to adequately treat patients. On top of that, almost 1.5 million health care workers have been laid off, tens of thousands have been furloughed and further hospital closures are being prepared despite the raging pandemic.

In opposition to the attempts by the Democratic Party to promote racial politics to divide the working class, the fight against racism and police violence among medical workers must be consciously fused with a struggle for social equality and the mobilization of resources to seriously combat the pandemic, and against the attempts of the Trump administration to establish a military dictatorship.



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