

Doctors locked out of hospital in Houston, Texas over rent dispute, forced to treat patients in parking lot

Chase Lawrence
21 January 2021

Staff and patients were locked out of the Heights Hospital in Houston, Texas without warning Monday, leaving medical equipment locked away, and forcing doctors to treat patients in the parking lot without access to their records.

The only notice given was a note on the locked door stating, “Please be advised that the door locks to the leased premises have been changed and tenant shall be excluded therefrom due to non-payment of rent.” The note further stated that the back rent and fees amounted to almost half a million dollars. Medical workers and other employees at the clinic, which treats more than 500 patients per week, are left not knowing if they will be paid their wages.

The sudden closure of the Heights Hospital follows 21 hospital closures in 2020 across the United States, many of which were thrust into acute financial crisis by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of the hospitals on the list compiled by *Becker’s Hospital Review*, many with hundreds of beds each, cited various financial strains including loss in federal funding, some citing severe staff shortages following mass desertions from horrifying conditions in hospitals, a loss in patients volume due to restrictions on elective surgeries, and a loss in reimbursement rate due to a higher rate of poorer patients. All of this has combined to contribute to a dramatic shrinking of profit margins which lead to the various for-profit and “non” profit hospitals to restructure their business in order to cut their losses.

Security and police were sent to the Heights Hospital this week to prevent staff from entering the hospital. The building, located at 1917 Ashland St. in the Heights, is home to three medical providers, including

1917 Ashland Ventures LLC. The building, according to property records, is owned by 1917 Heights Hospital LLC.

According to a lawsuit filed by Arbitra Capital Partners LLC in Harris County on January 8, the Nevada based company gave a \$28 million construction loan to 1917 Heights Hospital LLC which still owes some of the loan money, with the suit seeking over \$2 million. The dispute over this money appears to be the reason for the lockout. 1917 Heights Hospital is a subsidiary of AMD Global, a Houston commercial real estate company that bought the hospital in 2017.

The lawsuit further alleges that the owners of the Heights Hospital failed to pay “crucial management and maintenance expenses for this property, including invoices for utilities, elevator repair and even property insurance.” Another lawsuit from earlier in July 2020 was filed by Integranet Physician Resource, Inc. in Harris County against 1917 Heights Hospital LLC, claiming that the hospital owed it \$300,000.

Hospital staff members and patients spoke to ABC13 to express their exasperation at the desperate situation. Dr. Felicity Mack, the director and outpatient physician at the hospital, stated, “I tried to contact the owners... They aren't responding. The title company is not responding. We are really not getting any answers, but at the end of the day, my primary concern, like I said, is my patients.” Speaking to KHOU 11 Dr. Mack stated, “In the middle of a pandemic to take away health care access even further than what we already have issues with is just atrocious.”

A patient, Linda Fisher, who was suffering from long-term COVID-19 effects, said, “It’s detrimental to patients and to myself... It will impact my functionality.

I get regular visits all the time, so I don't know what's going to happen.”

Harris County, which is comprised of Houston and its suburbs, has seen over 287,000 confirmed COVID-19 infections and 3,866 deaths as of this writing, the highest death toll out of all of Texas’ counties.

“It's kind of disheartening,” patient Aneida Alexander told ABC13. “Kind of frightening too ... to have the rug jerked from under us with this. I'm so disappointed in whoever is running the place.”

Dr. John Thomas a physician at the hospital noted to KTRK, “It is very obvious that somebody is thinking only about money and not about community and lives.”

Only on Tuesday were some medical workers allowed back into the hospital briefly after having waited for hours outside, with a medical worker telling KHOU 11 that they were limited to two people at a time to retrieve items from the building.

The fiasco at the Heights Hospital—resulting from the private ownership of hospitals and a petty squabble over profit in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic—illustrates the objective necessity for the working class to nationalize the medical system and put it under the control of the working class for the fulfillment of human need rather than private profit.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact