

Beaumont Health announces that all of its Detroit-area emergency rooms are nearly full

Kevin Reed
17 September 2021

Beaumont Health, which operates eight hospitals in the Detroit metropolitan area, announced on Wednesday that all ten of its emergency departments were nearly full and urged the public to go elsewhere.

A midday announcement said that the Beaumont facilities “are experiencing extreme numbers of patients seeking medical attention and the health system is encouraging patients to consider all options for treatment and evaluation, such as urgent care, when appropriate.”

The statement went on to say some of the patients were “seeking care for COVID-19,” but “the overwhelming majority” of those arriving at the emergency rooms have “other medical conditions and concerns.”

The announcement included a statement from Beaumont Health CEO John Fox, who said, “Many people delayed getting tests and treatment for medical issues because of their concerns about the pandemic. Now, more than a year and a half after the pandemic began, those delays in care are resulting in medical emergencies.” Fox also said that the influx of unvaccinated and “extremely ill” patients suffering from the COVID-19 Delta variant have added to “a staffing shortage” and creating “a perfect storm.”

The announcement said that the staffing shortage had forced Beaumont Health to temporarily close 180 beds, or five percent of its capacity across the eight-hospital system.

Dr. David Donaldson, the emergency center chief at Beaumont Hospital in Troy, Michigan, told the *Detroit Free Press*, “What we’re currently seeing is different than the start of this pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, volumes across the country in emergency centers went down. ... But at this point, we’re not only seeing our now-normal volumes, meaning pre-

pandemic patient volumes, but we’re seeing that on top of COVID.”

Other hospitals in the area are experiencing similar conditions. Henry Ford Health System—which operates five hospitals in Detroit and one in Jackson, Michigan—announced Monday it had reduced its inpatient bed capacity by 120 because of staffing challenges.

Henry Ford’s Executive Vice President and Chief Clinical Officer Dr. Adnan Munkarah claimed that the 10 percent reduction “does not mean by any means that our level of care or safety of care is impacted.”

Ann Arbor-based Michigan Medicine said on Wednesday that its emergency department has been experiencing heavy volumes for the last month and recently shut down 13 beds because of staffing shortages.

The emergency room crisis in the Detroit area is the product of the refusal of the political establishment, the corporations, the media and the health care industry to respond to the pandemic with a policy of eradication and elimination. Preoccupied with mergers and acquisitions and the bottom line for the past year and a half, the executive management of hospital systems like Beaumont Health have done nothing to prepare for the present situation.

Beaumont Health CEO Fox epitomizes the negligence of the entire industry. In the midst of the first wave of COVID-19 in April 2020, the management of Beaumont announced the temporary closure of its hospital in Wayne, Michigan, and one week later 2,500 health care workers were furloughed and 450 were permanently terminated.

Meanwhile, CEO Fox has been spending his time throughout the pandemic concentrating on the financial performance of the \$5 billion health care system and

working on the next merger and acquisition opportunity. Beaumont had signed a \$6.1 billion agreement to merge with Akron-based Summa Health in January 2020 before the deadly pandemic had begun spreading throughout the US.

Despite the death and destruction that was visited upon the poorest, oldest and least-healthy segments of the population in Detroit and other major cities, the Beaumont CEO attempted to push forward with the Summa Health deal only announcing that it was being called off on May 29, 2020. The joint announcement ending the agreement did not even mention the pandemic which was by that point infecting hundreds and killing dozens each day.

The end of the Summa Health merger agreement did not stop Fox from continuing his crusade for a multibillion-dollar deal. Less than three weeks later, Beaumont announced a new merger plan with Advocate Aurora with 16 hospitals in Wisconsin and 12 hospitals in Illinois worth \$17 billion. The deal was ultimately scrapped due to a groundswell of opposition from doctors, nurses, other employees and community members who were outraged by the callousness of Fox toward the horrifying reality of death and suffering facing the hospital staff during the pandemic.

In announcing the collapse of the deal with Advocate Aurora in October 2020, Fox barely mentioned the staff opposition but instead attributed his failure entirely to the pandemic, saying that the “concerns” of nearly everyone except himself were “overshadowed by both COVID issues and non-COVID issues.” By “non-COVID issues” he meant the inability of the respective boards of directors to meet face-to-face during the talks.

Lastly, the unpreparedness of Beaumont for the present situation—including and especially the shortage of staff—comes amid the concentration of CEO Fox and the rest of the executive leadership of Beaumont on the latest merger plans announced on June 17 of this year with Spectrum Health of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The combined annual revenue of these two organizations would be approximately \$13 billion.

In keeping with his tactics of deflection, Fox’s statement regarding the unvaccinated being responsible for the present crisis is a complete diversion from the responsibility of the for-profit and nominally “non-profit” health care systems for their lack of

preparedness for the present situation. Hospital staffing shortages are not the result of a lack of qualified employees but rather the refusal of management to adequately compensate, staff and protect the doctors, nurses and support people.

In November 2020, public disclosures revealed that Beaumont paid John Fox a \$2.6 million bonus as part of his 2019 total compensation of \$6.75 million. The bonus was prepared just as the deadly coronavirus pandemic was hitting Detroit and paid out while the hospital was laying off staff.

At the end of last year, Beaumont Health was flush with \$3.49 billion in cash and investments, including \$500 million in Medicare Advance Payments and \$866 million in pandemic-related CARES Act payments and deferred payroll tax obligations from the federal government. Instead of using these resources to invest in the staff, the Beaumont Health leadership moved forward with its financial management strategy.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact