

Michigan Medicine worker speaks out against capitalism's COVID policy

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A veteran worker in the University of Michigan's Michigan Medicine health care system recently spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the terrible impact on his health and that of other workers of severe under-staffing and lack of protection from COVID-19 at the hospital. The worker asked that he remain anonymous for fear of victimization by management.

"I have Long COVID and feel it is basically ignored by the medical community," he said. "The reason why I am not sure. Perhaps they really do not know what to do for us. At best, it is frustrating.

"I was really sick and developed COVID pneumonia, then was hospitalized for two weeks. My lungs are scarred and permanently damaged, and this has made a very active middle-aged man about a third to less than half as active as prior. Lots of fatigue and brain fog persist, along with the persistent lung issues. I was an active walker, biker and hiker.

"My exposure to COVID was from a false negative test of a patient. It's not the patient's fault she was positive. I remember, a month after I came back I thought about being taken off of our mandated list. I didn't think I would have survived.

"Coworkers were saying I looked gray, but my boss just shrugged her shoulders. They don't care. It's not just UM though. We don't know who is sick and get exposed weekly, sometimes almost three times a week. I had COVID more than once. A patient waiting once told me it was like an assembly line."

The WSWs spoke to the worker some seven weeks after 6,200 Michigan Medicine nurses ratified a sellout contract brought forward by the Michigan Nurses Association (MNA), the parent union of the University of Michigan Professional Nurse Council (UMPNC).

The MNA-UMPNC promoted the contract as a "huge win," despite the fact that it did not seriously address any of the nurses' concerns. Nurses will receive wage

increases of 7.5 percent in 2022, 6 percent in 2023, 5 percent in 2024 and 4 percent in 2025, plus a \$5,000 ratification bonus. With the inflation rate at nearly 8 percent, this amounts to a cut in real wages.

Claiming that mandatory overtime would end, the MNA-UMPNC made sure there were exceptions to enable the hospital to continue the severe under-staffing that has become the norm not only at the University of Michigan-based health care system, but all across the country.

The nurses displayed militancy and determination to fight for better staffing ratios and an end to mandatory overtime, with a 95 percent strike authorization vote. But the union refused to call a strike, fearful that a mobilization of rank-and-file nurses would win the active support of other Michigan Medicine workers, as well as students, faculty and workers in other sectors across the state and nationally.

The fact that a strike would have come in the closing days of the midterm election campaign made the union bureaucracy all the more determined to block a strike and impose a sellout, since a strike would have quickly brought to the fore the hostility of the Democratic Party administrations in both Michigan and Washington to the nurses. The MNA-UMPNC and state AFL-CIO were campaigning furiously for the Democrats, who control the university Board of Regents and were centrally responsible for rejecting the nurses' demands.

Since the imposition of the contract, conditions have only worsened for Michigan Medicine nurses and other sections of workers in the health care system.

"The University of Michigan made a lot of money from the pandemic," the worker said. "Right now, it's considered slow, but the ER and pediatrics are getting full because of the combination of flu, COVID and RSV. There are about 1,600 infections a day and at the hospital they have lifted the mask mandate.

"RSV is increasing, especially with the schools open.

Before, we were diligent with masks. Management and some doctors were at home because they didn't want to be in this environment. But we workers were there. Some doctors in our department who were in-house bought us meals during the early period of COVID.

"Long COVID isn't even being talked about. COVID has mysteriously gone off the map."

A recent study by Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly and his colleagues at Washington University School of Medicine has exposed the claims used to justify the "forever COVID" policy of the Biden administration and other governments as a lie. The study found that reinfection contributed to death and hospitalization. This was in addition to complications in relation to previous conditions, including pulmonary, cardiovascular, hematological, diabetes, gastrointestinal, kidney, mental health, musculoskeletal and neurological disorders, regardless of vaccination status. Vaccination status does reduce the mortality risks, but it does not lead to an end to the pandemic or remove the risk of long-term disabilities.

Speaking about the Michigan Medicine nurses' contract struggle, the worker said: "The nurses here voted over 90 percent for strike authorization. Unions and capitalists killed for profit while sacrificing workers. Their contract was a sellout, with a \$5,000 bonus and no retro pay.

"I work with nurses and see burnout every day. I do not feel that patient care staff were treated well during the pandemic. Non-union employees had their 401k matches stopped and raises frozen for six months. Currently the matches and pay raises have increased, but not on par with inflation.

"The trust is gone for myself and for many of my associates. Employees that worked in-house during the first year of COVID and beyond are very dedicated to their jobs and patients. But most people who work there don't like it since it's political.

"The unions are like the Democrats and Republicans. When the hospital targets you, the unions don't do anything in response. Now our overtime incentives are removed, I should ask our managers if they received a bonus since then.

"The hospital kicks people when they're down. Some of us have not received COVID relief either. This was entirely mismanaged. With this we still have to worry about SARS, MRSA and tuberculosis.

"We have times when a patient complains, the hospital will ding us for it. Especially older employees. The hospital doesn't want to pay insurance or retirement, so they ride them until they leave.

"They want workers in the world to be clones and just work. But they won't get that. With Sarah Paxman, they just want to shut her up. This is happening everywhere. This woman is criminalized and censored for refusing to expose her child to the pandemic.

"I heard about the lockdown in China on the WWSWS. I was surprised that they eradicated it. We, on the other hand, don't even wear masks because of the politics.

"Everyone needs masks. Now the hospital has a policy where employees who have not received any vaccines can get a test on site. For those who have boosters and the vaccines, we have to test offsite.

"Both Biden and Trump received treatment because they're in the same class, unlike us workers. Antibodies are not offered in some cases.

"This place gave me COVID, but all they talk about is he, him. I agree with the pandemic being a socially criminal policy, and this happening internationally."

Responding to the recent midterm elections, the worker concluded, "I don't know who to vote for. I saw Biden's speech. He doesn't recognize our world. On the other side you have this agitator starting a fire.

"I listened to your report on Canada's Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland. It's contradictory, with her background and her claim for 'democracy.'

"Trump is losing his appeal, but so are the Democrats. This guy is trying to be a dictator. I can see that some things in history are repeating again. There's propaganda against Jews and others.

"After seeing what's happening with the rail workers, we all are dealing with wage slavery, like a stipend. A majority of the working class are living three to four paychecks from being homeless. It's a class struggle.

"I like your point with socialism and workers around the world working together. I read some of the *Communist Manifesto* with my limited time, and I've always felt workers need to unite against the apparatuses of the world."



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