

“I cry every day”: Chester, Pennsylvania healthcare workers speak about the devastating impact of the hospital system’s closure

Nick Barrickman, Landon Gourov
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Are you a resident in or near Chester, Pennsylvania? Tell us how the closures have affected you and your family, friends and co-workers by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Heartache and devastated lives are what remains of the community of Chester, Pennsylvania following the closure of both Crozer Hospital and Taylor Hospital at the end of April and earlier this month. The closures have left the community of 30,000 and broader Delaware County in southeast Pennsylvania without access to basic healthcare means, as well as resulted in 2,600 layoffs for healthcare workers overnight.

The closures, caused by the bankruptcy of the private equity firm which owns the hospitals, are the result of both rampant financial speculation and the destructive role of private profit in the healthcare system. The social devastation that has been left in their wake is a burning indictment of the entire capitalist profit system.

Nearly a decade ago, the health system was taken over by the private equity firm Leonard, Green & Partners (LGP) which owns Prospect Medical Holdings. Prior to bankruptcy, they were stripped of resources, loaded with debt through financial maneuvering, and eventually forced into bankruptcy and closure.

“I was a 27-year employee of Taylor Hospital,” one worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “For almost 20 of those years I worked every weekend as a Registered Nurse helping to rehabilitate patients with strokes, motor vehicle accidents and many other debilitating illnesses. I missed all of my Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and Easter holidays along with many of the other holidays.”

“I worked this past Easter and had no idea that that would be my last 12-hour shift at Taylor hospital,” they

said. Workers “were notified Tuesday that we would all be without our jobs that Friday! Not even a 30-day notice. We received no severance pay and only health benefits through May.”

“Prospect Medical destroyed health care in my community. With no local hospitals, people will die in an emergency! They need to have criminal charges, including murder, filed against them.” Others confirmed that they had been given less than a week’s notice prior to their being laid off and barely any resources to help them.

“We didn’t get a severance package. We got nothing,” said a former nutritionist at Taylor. “They stole from us. They took money and borrowed billions of dollars on the hospital.” The worker demanded that the hospital “be reopened. A lot of workers are suffering, especially the ones that have been there 30 years-plus and are close to retirement.

“I loved my coworkers and now we have to go somewhere else to start over at this age... We had nurses that were there for years. I’m talking 30-40 years. They pushed us out the door over greediness,” they said.

Another worker highlighted the role of both the state and federal government in the hospitals’ closure. They said “poor reimbursements from the insurance companies and in particular Medicaid reimbursements” played a particularly sharp role. They explained “often, physicians don’t get paid to treat patients under Medicaid guidelines,” receiving only “pennies on the dollar” for their services, creating a disincentive to receive Medicaid patients.

As a result, “we will lose our skilled surgeons and doctors. The insurance industry is 50 percent culpable in the collapse of Crozer Prospect. Insurance premiums go

up every year, but reimbursements don't."

While the community and health workers have been shown immense remorse, financial interests have continued to strip the hospitals of all they have left.

"They keep the managers and the CEOs working," said the former nutritionist. "They're still in the hospital every morning. I ride past there, I see the cars in the parking lot. They have an outside security guard company working in all the hospitals. They have money to pay for them, but they smash all our hospitals."

Last week, Pennsylvania's Democratic governor Josh Shapiro paid a visit to Chester in order to address the closures. In his remarks, which offered nothing to the impacted community, he declared his office would provide the region an insulting "\$1 million in new funding" in order to manage "an orderly and safe wind-down of services."

This has already resulted in tragedy for the community "Our union knows of a patient who died 20 minutes into a 30-minute ride to a hospital," said a registered nurse who had worked at Crozer for almost 40 years.

"He was shot down the street from Crozer. A helicopter had to land at a baseball field to pick up a trauma patient. The patient was in an ambulance who could have quickly been taken to Crozer. In this instance, Prospect isn't allowing helicopters to use Crozer's helipad. I guess because a few days earlier, an ambulance brought a burn patient to Crozer's helipad only to wait 30 minutes for a helicopter to come there and take the patient to another burn center. Our burn center was less than a minute walk behind them.

"Thousands of us need jobs. The majority live here in Delaware County. There's not that many jobs even available here," she added.

Former workers themselves face mounting hardships in the aftermath of the bankruptcy. One former nurse wrote in to explain the hardships she was facing:

I was a Crozer nurse, that was my identity. Now, who am I? I'm finding that places don't want to hire someone my age. I do have proof of one place doing this. I will get a lawyer.

As a nurse, I know the system. I had my medications refilled when we first thought we were closing. That three month supply is now running out.

Now I will ration my meds. I know that I shouldn't, I'm a nurse. I only have two weeks left

on one of my medications that I can't stop taking. I had contacted my Primary Care doctor for a written script during the process of our closing. They never did it. I'm sure the office was overwhelmed. A different doctor had just started me on a new medication. The pharmacy that she sent the script to, says insurance won't cover it unless the doctor fights and says it's medically needed. I call the office and am told they aren't doing that anymore. They too are closing up. She gave me some samples. The med costs \$1,800. My unemployment benefit won't cover my bills and that medicine.

Now I need to pick a new [primary care physician]. Most appointments are being scheduled in September. I'll end up in an ER after a seizure because I usually stop breathing and my heart stops.

I needed a procedure before having a surgery to see if there were any other issues. I canceled the procedure under my Crozer insurance because my new insurance won't do surgery for a year on a preexisting condition. What if they found cancer? So now I'm waiting. I need to find a doctor to do that procedure and see if my surgeon gets a job and where. All bad timing for me to have problems.

My husband is disabled. This disability check doesn't go far. We need medical insurance. Should be cheap since we have preexisting conditions. Not!

I cry every day. I can't wake up from this horrible dream. All because of greedy people. One day, they will meet their maker. Or better yet, need medical care.



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