Mount Sinai Hospital disciplines New York nurses who raised safety concerns

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Mount Sinai Hospital in New York has disciplined three nurses who discussed their concerns about workplace safety with their coworkers and the media. The cause of the nurses' concerns was an attempted shooting in the hospital's emergency room last month.

For discussing this life-or-death question, Mount Sinai sent two of the nurses written warnings and suspended the third. This blatant act of retaliation was carried out amid contract negotiations between management and the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA).

On November 13, 20-year-old Elijah Brown entered Mount Sinai's emergency room and threatened to open fire. Nurses later said the hospital's response to this threat was "chaotic." Workers in other areas of the hospital did not know for several minutes whether Brown was inside or outside the hospital. Brown triggered a metal detector on entering the emergency room, and this piece of equipment may have saved lives, according to workers.

A guard escorted Brown out of the hospital. Brown subsequently got into a confrontation with police, who then shot him. He was brought back into the hospital, where the same nurses whom he had threatened administered care to him. Brown died of his injuries while in the hospital. Fortunately, no staff member was hurt during the incident.

The attempted shooting underscores the dangerous conditions that nurses face. Healthcare workers are five times as likely to experience workplace violence as other workers, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. In a review published in *Public Health* in 2023, the prevalence of violence against healthcare workers was estimated to be as high as 78.9 percent.

The attempted shooting also is a symptom of the social crisis afflicting New York City. In August, the city's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased to 4.9 percent, which is above the national rate of 4.3 percent. Underemployment is estimated at 9.4 percent. Food prices in the New York metropolitan area have risen by 25.2 percent since 2019. It is estimated that more than 350,000 New Yorkers were homeless in October 2025.

These deplorable conditions, combined with official indifference, contribute to anger, desperation and mental illness, especially among the most vulnerable. In the absence of a genuine, organized opposition to the social system, some workers seek an individual outlet for their frustration. Factors such as frustration with the rationing of care under the for-profit healthcare system, and the White House's campaign against health science no doubt also play a role.

Following the attempted shooting at Mount Sinai, nurses Gueldye Beaubrun, Sophie Damas and an unnamed nurse took the opportunity to discuss NYSNA's safety proposals with their fellow nurses. Among other measures, the union is calling for weapons detection systems to be installed at every hospital entrance. Beaubrun also spoke to the press about the attempted shooting and the nurses' safety demands.

Beaubrun's supervisor later told her that she had broken hospital policy by discussing union matters with her coworkers while on the job. Beaubrun denies this allegation and maintains that she was off duty and not caring for any patients at the time. She and Damas each received a "final written warning" from Mount Sinai management on the day after Thanksgiving. The third nurse, whose name has not been disclosed, was suspended.

In a letter to hospital staff sent a few days after the attempted shooting, Mount Sinai CEO Brendan Carr said that "campus safety is an essential foundation upon which we build our organizational culture and trust." But management has disciplined the very workers who sought to discuss ways to improve their safety following what could have been a fatal encounter. The warning letters and the suspension are acts of retaliation that threaten workers' safety and destroys the "trust" that Mount Sinai claims to be building.

Last week, NYSNA held a rally outside Mount Sinai's emergency department to demand that the disciplinary measures against the nurses be dropped. The union reportedly plans to file a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board. But actions such as these have long proven

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ineffective, and NYSNA officials will not mount a serious defense of these workers against management's retaliation or against the threat of workplace violence.

Nurses and other healthcare workers must organize themselves to defend their right to free speech through a rank-and-file defense committee, independent of the NYNSA bureaucrats. A committee would plan actions to force the dropping of these measures and prevent similar ones in the future, rather than waiting an eternity for the results of grievances or complaints to the Trump-controlled NRLB.

On December 31, contracts will expire for about 20,000 nurses at 12 private hospitals, including 4,300 nurses at Mount Sinai. Nurses should use this opportunity to raise demands to defend democratic and social rights, including the right to high-quality healthcare.

Acting through a rank-and-file committee and not waiting for the say-so of NYSNA officials, they should mobilize support among workers across the city and the US by calling for nurses' control over staffing and safety, inflation-busting raises to end the hemorrhaging of qualified nurses and other health professionals, and ultimately the nationalization of the healthcare industry under workers' control.

NYSNA officials will never take actions required to organize a real fight because it is determined to prevent a strike and enforce the interests of management, just as it did when the previous contract expired.

In 2022, NYSNA members voted by nearly 99 percent to authorize a strike. Their main demands were safe nurse-to-patient ratios and raises that beat inflation. Conditions were ripe for a powerful struggle of thousands of nurses that would have electrified healthcare workers throughout New York—and throughout the country. But NYSNA bureaucrats prevented such a struggle by keeping nurses divided by hospital, announcing last-minute tentative agreements and calling off strikes.

The agreement with NewYork-Presbyterian sets the pattern for those at other hospitals. Instead of providing safe staffing, the agreement included vague language about adding more full-time positions, without specifying the nature or number of the positions. Moreover, the initial "raise" included in the contract was in fact a cut to real wages, since it fell short of inflation. Using a time-honored and anti-democratic tactic, NYSNA forced nurses to vote on the agreements before they had any chance to review them.

Union officials could not prevent strikes at Mount Sinai or Montefiore Medical Center because of the intensity of nurses' frustration at these facilities. Nevertheless, it ended the strikes after three days and announced "historic" tentative agreements resembling the one with NewYork-Presbyterian. These agreements neither addressed understaffing nor provided adequate raises to compensate for high inflation.

The Mount Sinai Health System has been fined millions of dollars for persistent understaffing at its hospitals, including Mount Sinai Hospital, Mount Sinai Morningside and Mount Sinai West. When Mount Sinai Hospital was fined for three months of persistent understaffing in its neonatal intensive care unit, each of the affected nurses received little more than a day's pay in compensation.

Rather than securing safe staffing, the contracts have institutionalized understaffing, management sees the fines as an acceptable cost of doing business. Consequently, nurses remain overworked, and patients remain at higher risk of poor outcomes.

At bottom, violence against healthcare workers requires a fight against the subordination of society to profit. NYSNA officials advocate weapons detection and increased security. Though these measures may have an immediate effect in preventing acts of violence, they are not a solution to the cause of the crisis, which is capitalism itself. Worse, they use these measures to whip up a law-and-order atmosphere.

The nurses at Mount Sinai and throughout New York must wrest control of their struggle from the NYSNA bureaucrats. The first step must be the formation of rank-and-file committees that are outside the control of the union and independent of both capitalist parties.

The establishment of these democratically controlled committees is essential to prevent NYSNA from imposing another sellout contract as it did in 2023. Moreover, the fight to provide the highest quality care to all requires a fight against for-profit medicine, which must be replaced by socialist healthcare.

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