



March 19th, 2024

Professional Distinction

Personal Dignity

Patient Advocacy

Hennepin County Commissioners
Hennepin County Government Center
Room 300
South 6th St.
Minneapolis, MN 55487

Dear Commissioners,

Nurses and other direct healthcare staff at Hennepin Healthcare Systems (HHS) came to you with deep concerns about the cuts in worker health plans. We were happy to hear there was going to be an audit of the health plans; however, we are quite concerned that the audit did not include interviews with workers to understand the reality of the cuts, many of which may not show up in a numerical data analysis of the plans. Due to the lack of this review, here is an update from the MNA nurses on what the health plan cuts look like.

The health insurance plan is worse than we predicted. We have nurses reaching out regularly to let us know of the surprises they are finding with the cost, lack of coverage and lack of access to health care services on our new plans. For example, maternity care not received at HHS went from at \$250 co-pay to a 25% co-insurance after a deductible. This left employees who were already pregnant in 2023 scrambling to establish care at HHS only to be told there were not appointments available to establish prenatal care at HHS.

2024 brought significant changes for medication coverage, not just for weight loss but for other debilitating conditions. In 2023, specialty medications filled at HHS had a \$20 co-pay, this co-pay is now \$100-\$150 and many medications are no longer covered at all.

A nurse whose daughter has a rare genetic condition, previously filled all her prescriptions at a specialty pharmacy that kept these medications in stock. In 2024, this nurse was notified that specialty pharmacies were no longer covered under our new plan. This has led to an extreme amount of stress as HHS does not stock these medications and they are available when needed. Additionally, the HHS pharmacy charges extra for the needles, alcohol pads and sharps containers necessary for the administration of these medications.

Nurses and their families are attempting to move all care to HHS to avoid costly co-pays, deductibles, and co-insurance costs but the system does not have the capacity to accommodate the influx of patients. Children attempting to get psychiatric care are placed on a yearlong wait list. Patients are waiting four to six months for dermatology appointments which can cause at best discomfort and at worst a change in a patient's ability to receive prompt

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medical care for cancer or other diagnoses. Post-op visits are months after the procedure which can cause immense challenges in recovery and healing. Some employees were even told by scheduling they are no longer eligible to be seen at the clinic at all due to lack of provider availability. It is abundantly clear that HHS leadership is attempting to solve budgetary issues by increasing patients with private pay/commercial insurance which is in direct conflict with the mission and vision of Hennepin Healthcare.

When fellow nurses come to us as chairs to ask what they should do and if there will be positive changes to our health plans and benefits, we continue to tell them to hold on. We have faith the County Board will work to implement changes to help retain workers and right all the challenging changes that we saw throughout the last few years. However, the strain of these losses paired with the ongoing challenges of providing care to our patient population is too much for some and we have to say goodbye to our colleagues regularly. We're concerned this will only increase if there is not direct intervention soon.

Workers at Hennepin Health System need to have a reason to hold on. County Commissioners, they need your intervention now.

Please reach out to us at hcmcofficers@mnnurses.org if you have any questions or need additional information.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Janell Johnson Thiele and Jeremy Olson-Ehlert
HCMC MNA Chairs