

HPAE. Putting care first.

April 4, 2017

Statement from Sue Clements
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HPAE Local 5106 Vice President

I have been a nurse at Temple University Hospital, Episcopal Campus for over 40 years. We are located at Front and Lehigh, few short blocks from the infamous Conrail tracks where thousands of discarded needles give witness to the opioid epidemic in our city. A few weeks ago on a single day shift, seventeen people arrived in our ER with drug overdoses. Almost all were due to heroin. Our ER staff provide emergency treatment with Narcan which reverses the effects of heroin. At times these patients are literally minutes from death. But it is not just the overdose patients that we care for. It is the patients who develop serious diseases like HIV, Hepatitis C, bacterial endocarditis, and abscesses from their drug use. Many are treated in our inpatient medical unit and when they are ready for discharge they are offered drug rehab by our social workers

Frequently our patients present to our Crisis Response Center, a psychiatric emergency room, seeking drug rehab but despite the best efforts of our staff to find a bed there are often none available. In a recent Inquirer article our CRC medical director, Camile Paglia, noted that "Many return to Episcopal the next day and the next hoping for better news. Other go back to the needle right away. Some don't survive the night—police have found the bodies of addicts, still wearing hospital wristbands, out near the tracks."

Drug addiction is a problem that crosses all ages, cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds. People who have had serious injuries resulting in chronic pain have found themselves buying drugs on the street when their doctors can no longer prescribe narcotics. Most of the patients we see at Episcopal have long histories of abuse. When our patients tell us they have been using drugs and alcohol since they were twelve years old it is heart breaking. When our patients tell us that both of their parents were addicts it is heartbreaking. When you discharge a patient from the hospital to a shelter because they have no place else to go, it is heartbreaking because even though they are "clean" today, it is unlikely that they will be clean tomorrow.

We cannot afford to reduce services to this vulnerable population. The ACA has helped to provide coverage, but there is so much more that needs to be done, not just in healthcare, but in our society to break the cycle of poverty, homelessness, joblessness so that hope for the future will prevent the escape into drug use.

A few weeks ago when we were in the midst of the fight to prevent the repeal of the ACA, Our union reps went floor to floor in our Hospital and collected over 200 signatures on a letter to Senator Toomey that we will deliver today. Our message is clear. Hands off our healthcare!

We are here now. We are motivated. We are paying attention to what is happening in our country in a way that we did not before. We are understanding that everyone deserve a quality of life if we are to truly be a great country.



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