

**11/20/2007 – Champaign County Health Care Consumers/Health Care
Access Task Force – Carle Clinic Protest – Statements**

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Cindy McDonnell

Health Care Access Task Force – Carle Clinic Protest

Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2007

Good morning and thank you all for being here.

- My name is Cindy McDonnell, and I am an Advocate with the Champaign County Health Care Consumers Hotline, and also a member of the Health Care Access Task Force. The Health Care Access Task Force organized today's protest to call attention to Carle Clinic's harmful and discriminatory policies that deny care to thousands of Champaign County residents, and to demand an end to these practices and a right for all county residents to get the health care they need.

- Before I talk to you about the health care access crisis and the Health Care Access Task Force and our protest today, I want to take a moment to introduce you to the other speakers.

- Today, we will hear from Jeff Scott, another Health Care Access Task Force member who got a very disturbing letter from Carle Clinic regarding pregnant women's access to care at Carle Clinic.

- Paulette Colemon, who is here with family members, will talk about how three generations in her family are denied access to care at Carle Clinic.

- Ron Eaker, also a Health Care Access Task Force member and affected consumer will talk about what the Health Care Access Task Force wants.

- Lastly, we will hear from Claudia Lennhoff, director of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers, who will talk about the delegation of Task Force members who will go inside to deliver a Thanksgiving card to Carle Clinic administrators demanding changes in Carle Clinic's policies. Media are invited to follow the delegation as they go in to deliver the card.

- Now, I want to take a couple of minutes to talk about the health care crisis and why we're here protesting Carle Clinic today...

-We are experiencing a massive crisis in access to health care in Champaign County. Close to 40% of our residents are locked out of the health care system because both major physician clinics in Champaign County, Carle Clinic and Christie Clinic, have enacted policies that limit or deny appointments and services to patients with Medicaid insurance, uninsured patients and patients who are insured but have medical debt.

-Together, Carle and Christie Clinics house more than 90% of the doctors in Champaign County. As a result, these patients have virtually nowhere else to go for primary or specialty health care.

-When people do not have access to primary care, they often end up in the emergency

departments of our local hospitals, which is the most expensive form of health care for those individuals and for taxpayers.

- In response to this crisis, the Champaign County Health Care Consumers started the Health Care Access Task Force which is comprised of community members that are dedicated to working to end the crisis and create a lasting solution that guarantees quality, affordable health care for all Champaign County residents.

-The Health Care Access Task Force is looking for solutions at the federal, state and local levels but we think that locally one solution is clear. Carle Clinic and Christie Clinic must change their policies and start to take their fair share of the 75,000 Champaign County residents that have Medicaid insurance or lack insurance.

- Carle Clinic has publicly promised the community that it would expand access to care for people with Medicaid and All Kids insurance, but as we will hear from our speakers today, people with Medicaid insurance have been actively discouraged from getting care at Carle Clinic.

- Carle Clinic also limits or denies care to uninsured patients, leaving tens of thousands of Champaign County residents without access to needed health care.

-The Health Care Access Task Force is protesting Carle Clinic today to demand an end to its harmful and discriminatory policies.

In the spirit of Thanksgiving, we are asking Carle Clinic to open its doors to the thousands of Champaign County residents who would be thankful to finally have access to timely, affordable health care this season.

By working together, we can create a healthy community in which everyone has access to health care.

Jeff Scott

Press Conference Statement

Carle Clinic Protest – Tues., Nov. 20, 2007

Hello, I'm Jeff Scott and I'm here with my daughter, Lauren.

I came out today for the same reasons that many of you did—to recognize the great disparity of health care access in this community! to proclaim it unjust! to demand change! and to hold Carle Clinic accountable!

After joining the Health Care Access Task Force last spring, I first read about how the local clinics were the target of a lawsuit filed in June by the Illinois Attorney General. Allegedly, in violation of anti-trust laws, Carle Clinic conspired with Christie Clinic to boycott new Medicaid patients in search

of primary care. As a result of the clinic's actions, wait lists for services at Frances Nelson grew exponentially as did the number of emergency room visits made by families with Medicaid. In effect, driven by the desire for profit, the clinics greatly compromised the medical interests of this area's most vulnerable residents.

Not long after the law suit had been filed, I began to see stories in the local paper about the clinic's plans to take on more Medicaid clients, specifically through the All Kids and FamilyCare programs. The clinics seemed to be supporting Illinois Health Connect, a statewide effort to expand access to the medical system for those unable to afford private health insurance.

The Attorney General's law suit and the clinics' promises to participate in Health Connect seemed incompatible, and thus, in my mind, the level of commitment by the clinics to our community's medically underserved remained in question.

It was in this context that my wife and I initiated contact with Carle Clinic early this fall in anticipation of our second child. We got a letter from the clinic's Patient Accounts and Financial Services division with information regarding insurance coverage. Along with an itemized cost breakdown, the letter detailed the kinds of insurance for which Carle Clinic was not a participating provider. Considering Carle Clinic promised in the summer months to serve more Medicaid clients, I was shocked to read the following lines:

"Please be aware that Carle Clinic is unable to accept new Illinois Department of Healthcare & Family Services, All Kids, etc. so if you have no insurance and are planning on applying for IDHFS (Medicaid) through the "Moms and Babies" program and are not currently a patient with the OB department in Urbana, you will need to contact either Planned Parenthood [phone number omitted] or Frances Nelson Healthcare [phone number omitted] for prenatal services."

The letter continued: "You have 30 days after the birth of your baby to let Carle Clinic know of the baby's coverage. Carle Clinic is no longer able to accept primary IDHFS coverage on new patients and if IDHFS or All Kids will be the primary coverage for your baby you will need to contact either the Dept. of Public Health or Frances Nelson Healthcare for well baby check-ups."

Although this letter is not dated, my family and I received it within the last six weeks or so. It has now come to my attention that Carle Clinic is claiming that these letters were no longer supposed to be going out, and that there is a new letter—apparently one that does not tell families with Medicaid insurance that they have to go elsewhere for prenatal and well baby care.

If it is the case that Carle Clinic has stopped Medicaid discrimination against pregnant women, then we would all agree this is great news. However, given their track record of discrimination, I think that if Carle Clinic is now truly welcoming of Medicaid patients, they need to be proactive and proclaim this to the community, because otherwise, people, based on their recent and past experiences, will continue to stay away, thinking they can't see the doctors who practice in these buildings.

It is encouraging if Carle Clinic no longer sends expectant parents letters of this sort [holding up letter], but in measurable terms of expanded access the proof will be in the pudding. More than half of the births in Illinois are subsidized by the Illinois Department of Health care and Family Services. That said, the Medicaid population in Champaign County exceeds 20,000, and according to data reported by Heartland Alliance, Champaign County has one of the highest rates of extreme poverty in the state. These facts beg the question: What share of babies delivered by Carle doctors are to families that rely on public assistance? If Carle Clinic is honestly committed to health care access, this number should be considerable and on the rise.

Ultimately, Carle Clinic has to stop treating Medicaid health insurance like a market commodity, accepting it inconsistently over time at their convenience. Low-income families in this community should be able to call Carle Clinic their permanent, primary care home.

Ron Eaker

Press Conference Statement

Carle Clinic Protest – Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2007

Good morning.

My name is Ron Eaker, and I am also a member of the Health Care Access Task Force, and a person of “non-service” here at Carle Clinic.

As you have heard, Champaign County is experiencing a gigantic access to health care crisis affecting tens of thousands of county residents.

The crisis is overwhelmingly the result of policies at Carle Clinic and Christie Clinic that limit, deny, or price health care out of reach for the people of our community. Carle Clinic alone employs over 60% of Champaign County’s physicians. Therefore, if Carle Clinic were to change its harmful and discriminatory policies, this would help bring an end to our community’s crisis.

Today, we are calling on Carle Clinic to change its harmful and discriminatory policies.

Specifically, Carle Clinic should:

1. Guarantee access to care for everyone.

Carle Clinic should stop denying or limiting services to people because of the type of insurance they have, such as Medicaid, or because of outstanding debt.

Carle Clinic should accept and honor all major forms of public and private insurance.

Carle Clinic should stop the practice of “non-servicing” patients.

2. Carle Clinic should collaborate with other health care providers to accept referrals and honor their financial assistance programs.

For example, Carle Clinic should guarantee all Carle Hospital patients access to Carle Clinic doctors for follow-up and ongoing care.

And Carle Clinic should guarantee access to care for all Frances Nelson Community Health Center

patients.

3. Carle Clinic should provide fair pricing for uninsured patients, giving them the same discounts that Carle Clinic gives to major insurance companies.

And

4. Carle Clinic should work with patients to set up reasonable payment agreements, and they should honor those payment agreements.

These are changes that Carle Clinic could make today – there is nothing preventing Carle Clinic from making these policy changes, except their *lack* of desire to serve the community. If Carle Clinic made these changes today, thousands of Champaign County residents would no longer be in crisis.

In the spirit of Thanksgiving, we are asking Carle Clinic to make these changes and open its doors to the thousands of Champaign County residents who would be thankful to finally have access to timely, affordable health care this season.

To complete my statement I would like to lead all present in a Thanksgiving Prayer:

O Eternal God, Creator and preserver of all life, I thank you for the opportunity to represent thousands of individuals who are being unfairly and unethically treated by this health care institution. I ask you, O God, to help those physicians who are in the policy making position to remember their Hippocratic Oath and open their doors to all who need medical assistance. I trust that we can add these changes to our list of things to celebrate this Thanksgiving season. Unite us to ever care for those less fortunate and in need. AMEN

Paulette Colemon

Press Conference Statement

Carle Clinic Protest – Tuesday, Nov. 20, 2007

Good morning. My name is Paulette Colemon, and this is my daughter Brittney and my grandson Brennon.

We are here today because we have been victims of discrimination by Carle Clinic.

We are three generations of just one family that have been victimized by Carle Clinic's policies of discrimination against Medicaid patients.

How many more families are there? How many more generations of people live in this community who have been discriminated against? We are here today to speak out on behalf of all the people who have suffered Carle Clinic's discrimination.

About eight years ago, I had Medicaid and I was a Carle Clinic patient. But I needed oral surgery, and I was refused oral surgery because I had Medicaid.

My son Steven was also refused care at Carle Clinic because of a Medicaid billing error on behalf of the Clinic.

Since then, when Carle Clinic made a mistake with our Medicaid, and they said we owed them money, no one in my family has been able to go to Carle Clinic for the past eight years.

We were forced to become Frances Nelson patients.

We are grateful for Frances Nelson, but I think it's really unfair that Carle Clinic dumps all the unwanted patients on Frances Nelson, and Frances Nelson can barely keep up.

Last year, my daughter Brittney gave birth to my beautiful grandson, Brennon.

When Brittney found out she was pregnant, she tried to get an appointment at Carle Clinic, but was told that in order to have her baby at Carle Hospital, she would have to get her prenatal care at Planned Parenthood. Carle Clinic wouldn't see her for prenatal care.

Although my grandson Brennon was born at Carle Hospital, he was never considered to be a patient of Carle Clinic doctors and he was not allowed to come to Carle Clinic for well-baby check-ups. **He experienced discrimination before he was born!** Claudia says this is a special form of Carle Clinic discrimination called "in utero discrimination."

Carle decided Brennon would be born at Carle Hospital but could not be a Clinic patient.

That's why Brennon's sign says "Born at Carle 12/27/06; Banned from Carle 12/28/06."

When he was discharged after his birth, he was not allowed to come back to Carle Clinic.

How can you be born there, but not be a patient?

They want to act like he is something that they took out of Brittney, like a tumor or something – not like a new little person!

He didn't even get a Clinic number or anything!

Giving birth is one of the happiest times of your life, but at Carle, you are made to feel bad because of the insurance you have – like you don't count as much as a U of I employee or a state employee.

Carle claims to be proud of the babies they deliver, but when you're not looking, they're throwing some of them out!

Carle Clinic is saying that they no longer discriminate against Medicaid patients.

They say they are no longer sending out that nasty letter to pregnant women.

But Carle Clinic has not made an apology to the community for their past discrimination, and they have not sent me and my family any letters welcoming us back to the Clinic.

I know that Carle Clinic didn't start taking Medicaid patients again because they want to serve the community; they did this because the state worked out a deal with them where they get money each month for each Medicaid patient that they see.

I'm glad for the Medicaid patients who can get in; but I'm going to keep fighting for all the people – those with Medicaid and those who are uninsured – who still can't get in!

I don't want to see one more generation of my family being denied care here.