



# Champaign County Health Care Consumers

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*Grassroots organizing for health care justice since 1977.*

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November 20, 2007

Dear Dr. Wellman and Carle Clinic Association Board of Directors,

On this Tuesday prior to Thanksgiving, the Health Care Access Task Force of the Champaign County Health Care Consumers (CCHCC) would like to ask you to join with the community in working in good faith to end the health care access crisis affecting thousands of Champaign County residents.

Champaign County residents are experiencing a massive access to health care crisis. Despite an ample supply of health care providers (including Carle Clinic, which alone, employs over 60% of Champaign County physicians), close to 40% (approximately 75,000 people) of Champaign County's population is locked out of the health care system. Too many people cannot get timely and affordable primary, preventive, and specialty health care services at our local clinics.

Carle Clinic and Christie Clinic combined employ over 90% of the doctors in Champaign County, and both Clinics have policies that limit or deny appointments and services to: a) Patients without health insurance (approximately 54,990 people); b) Patients with Medicaid insurance (approximately 20,449 people); and c) Patients who may be insured, but have medical debt (unknown number of individuals). As a result, these patients have virtually nowhere to turn for health care services.

The Health Care Access Task Force is organizing to solve this health care access crisis, and wants to invite Carle Clinic to join us in working to create a sustainable solution that guarantees timely access to quality, affordable health care for all Champaign County residents.

Because the crisis in our community is largely a result of Clinic policies that limit, deny, or price health care out of reach for large numbers of Champaign County residents, changes to Carle Clinic policies could immediately help to end the crisis. The Health Care Access Task Force believes that if Carle Clinic changed its policies in the following ways, thousands of Champaign County residents would be helped:

**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.
- Cease practice of categorizing patients as "persons of non-service" and denying them care.
- Guarantee access to all Carle Clinic Departments to people with Medicaid insurance, uninsured people, and people with medical debt.

**2. Collaborate with other health care providers to accept referrals and honor their assistance programs**

- Guarantee all Carle Foundation Hospital patients access to Carle Clinic physicians for follow-up and ongoing care.
- Honor hospitals' financial assistance programs and apply discounts to patient bills that result from hospitalization or hospital-based services.

- Guarantee access to all Frances Nelson Community Health Center patients referred to Carle Clinic for services, and honor the discount level provided to the patient by Frances Nelson.
- 3. Carle Clinic should provide fair pricing for uninsured patients, giving them the same discounts that Carle Clinic gives to major insurance companies.**
- 4. Allow reasonable payment agreements**
- Work with consumers to make reasonable payment agreements that are affordable to the consumers, and realistic.
  - Honor payment agreements.
  - Cease the practice of demanding large lump sum payments from patients prior to appointments or procedures.

Health care is unlike any other commercial good or service, and should not be allocated in the same way that other commercial goods and services are allocated. Health care is a specialized essential service that all people, regardless of income level or insurance status, need in order to have an adequate standard of living. Health care is a basic necessity of life.

Whether for-profit or non-profit, the most basic ethical obligation that health care providers have to the community within which they practice is to provide health care services to local residents.

True access to health care services includes affordable prices and reasonable payment plans, as well as acceptance of public insurance (such as Medicare and Medicaid) in addition to all other dominant forms of health insurance of the area. Limiting or denying care to any population within the community is unacceptable, harmful to the community as a whole, and is a violation of the basic ethical obligations of health care providers. No one should be locked out of any part of the health care system.

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.

We would also like to invite you to meet with the Health Care Access Task Force, if you would like to talk about how we can work together to improve health care access for Champaign County residents. If you would like to set up a meeting, please contact Claudia Lennhoff, CCHCC Executive Director, at (217) 352-6533, or send a letter to the address above. We look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

The Health Care Access Task Force