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TONY ZIELINSKI
ALDERMAN, 14TH DISTRICT

Ascension contributing to health care disparity gulf in Milwaukee

Statement of Alderman Tony Zielinski April 13, 2018

The recent news of hospital downsizing and service cuts by Ascension Wisconsin in Milwaukee is extremely troubling to me. By making these choices Ascension is exacerbating the health care disparity problem in Milwaukee, where there is already insufficient delivery of health care services in neighborhoods where people of color reside.

Vernellia R. Randall is a professor at the School of Law at the University of Dayton. Professor Randall writes extensively on and speaks internationally about race, women, and health care. In her published article *Inequality in Health Care Is Killing African Americans* (Vol. 36 No. 4), she points to racial discrimination in the U.S. and its lasting and harmful impact on African Americans.

“Compounding the racial discrimination experienced generally is the institutional discrimination in health care affecting access to health care and the quality of health care received. Racial discrimination in health care delivery, financing, and research continues to exist. Racial barriers to quality health care manifest themselves in many ways, including (1) economic discrimination, which rations health care on ability to pay; (2) **insufficient hospitals and health care institutions and clinics**; (3) **insufficient physicians and other providers**; (4) racial discrimination in treatment and services; and (5) culturally incompetent care.”

Sadly this is what we are seeing now as Ascension downsizes its services at St. Joseph Hospital. The safety net is essentially being yanked out from under the mostly African American patient base at St. Joseph, leaving already underserved individuals to figure out what their next best options are.

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On the south side – in an area heavily populated by Latinos – another Ascension facility, St. Francis Hospital, is apparently also being targeted for significant service reductions.

According to the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) there is a critical shortage of health care providers, especially the most needed primary care physicians, serving in rural areas and in the **inner city**. “This directly impacts the Latino community as that is where most of our community resides. In fact, there are almost 14,000 areas across the United States with shortages in personnel for primary medical care, dental care or mental health care,” according to LULAC.

We need to hold Ascension accountable for contributing to minority health care disparities in Milwaukee. As LULAC so succinctly points out, “Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have consistently experienced social and economic obstacles to health and/or factors that influence health based on their ethnic group, gender, age, disabilities, gender identity, geographic location or other characteristics.”

We need to stand up for our fellow citizens and work to stop and reverse the Ascension cutbacks immediately!

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