

May 27, 2012

Sen. Franken Field Hearing: "Ensuring Patients' Access to Care and Privacy: Are Federal Laws Protecting Patients?"

May 30, 2012

Testimony by Jean Ross, RN

Senator Franken, Members of this hearing committee:

Thank you for holding this important hearing, on behalf of patients, family members and nurses at Fairview and all over the country.

My name is Jean Ross, and I am a Registered Nurse. In December of 2009 I was elected Co-President of National Nurses United, and currently still hold the position. Previously, I worked as an RN for Fairview Southdale Hospital in Edina, Minnesota for over 35 years.

The following is my personal account of two different incidents involving the Fairview health care system in the past two years that affected my family and me.

In 2010, my infant grandchild was very ill over one weekend. On a Friday and then again on Saturday night, I accompanied my daughter and the baby for separate trips to the Emergency Room at Fairview Ridges Hospital in Burnsville, where he was eventually diagnosed with encephalitis (or meningitis) and was then transferred to Minneapolis Children's Hospital.

Our time at Ridges was made especially jarring however, by the actions of ancillary personnel who had nothing to do with the care of our young family member.

My daughter was extremely worried and had many questions but was holding up well - until I left to use the rest room. When I returned she was holding the baby and sobbing. I assumed she must have received some bad news about the baby's condition. Instead, I learned that while I, the nurse and doctor were out of the room, a woman had come in and asked if my daughter was willing to pay all or any part of her bill now. My daughter told her no, she could not. As background, my daughter and her husband are among many families hit hard with medical bills and changes to insurance coverage. She certainly did not need reminders of her financial position while under the stress of worrying about the condition of her youngest child.

Now fast forward to February of this year. My same daughter has just delivered her third child at Fairview Ridges. Within 24 hours, a Fairview representative visits my

daughter's room with a goal to extract "some or all" of the payment for the bill. According to my daughter, this woman was at least apologetic, even confessing "this was the least favorite part of her job."

Senator Franken, I spent much of my time at Fairview Southdale working in the ER. While there I witnessed no such behavior. This kind of ruthless, corporate behavior simply would not have been allowed. Nurses' main focus is to advocate for patients and families. We urge patients to put other worries aside and to concentrate exclusively on healing. They certainly do not need the added burden of being pressed for payment while they are being treated.

Every nurse wants to be proud of the work we do, and we expect policies that allow us to do our job properly. We want to be able to speak well of the place that employs us.

Programs or policies that encourage or require bill collection while a patient is being treated are, I believe, unethical and do not belong in any health care setting. It does not reflect well on any institution, and I am very disappointed in the system that employed me for so many years. I am even more aggravated at an overall health care system that does not allow universal access to all who are vulnerable, and that drives providers to this misguided and disgraceful behavior.

I thank you all for your time.

Jean Ross, RN, mother, grandmother