



HEALTH WATCH

c/o New York State AFL-CIO
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Mr. Michael Israel
President and Chief Executive Officer
Westchester County Health Care Corporation
100 Woods Road
Valhalla, NY 10595

April 11, 2024

Dear Mr. Israel,

I write on behalf of 911 Health Watch is an independent, 501(c)3 watch group, established to monitor the programs created by the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, including the World Trade Center Health Program. We are deeply concerned with how Westchester Medical Center Health Care System and its subsidiaries are planning to change the way they provide care to injured and ill 9/11 responders and survivors.

Westchester Medical Center Health Care System had been, until recently part of the World Trade Center Health Care Network, providing access to care for injured and ill 911 responders and survivors throughout its system including Westchester Medical Center, your Behavioral Center, Bon Secours Community Hospital Good Samaritan Hospital, Margaretville Hospital, Mid-Hudson Regional Hospital and St. Anthonys Community Hospital as well as your doctors and other medical staff.

911 Health Watch Inc has learned that your Vice President for Managed Care has informed the World Trade Center Health Program's third-party administrator that it will no longer be part of the WTC Health Program Network. The reason cited is that the World Trade Center Health Program does not provide the volume of patients that Westchester County Medical System would like to see.

It is our understanding that your VP stated "...that they only sign agreements based on patient volume and the Program does not have enough volume to warrant an agreement. "

While Westchester Medical Center Health Care System says it will allow the WTC Health Program to utilize its system but only with the World Trade Center Health Program entering into Single Case Agreements. This case-by-case basis process requires an immense amount of paperwork, imposes additional costs, and most importantly delays in access to care that is needed.

This is unacceptable.

Basically, you are saying that because there aren't enough sick 911 responders and survivors for your business, you will make it harder for those who need help to get it.

Allowing access to your health system's resources by requiring single use agreements is an extremely cumbersome inefficient approach that leads to overall less than optimal patient care. These terribly ill patients require care from more than one physician of one division in a hospital – each requiring a separate agreement before care can be provided. There are radiology images that need to be interpreted, emergency dept visits, anesthesia for surgeries, infectious disease, critical care, oncology, hematology, physical therapy and on and on. Each would require its own single-use agreement. This leads to patient visit cancellations, service claims that remain open and when finally rectified may be too late to be paid under current guidelines. Claims that go unpaid are then the responsibility of the patient only because the necessary agreements were not in place.

Westchester Medical Center Healthcare System should not be requiring single case agreements and should remain in the World Trade Center Health Program Network.

Given that the Campus of Westchester Medical Center was the staging area for the Westchester response to the World Trade Center in the hours and days after the attack, your Systems decision is even more unsettling.

I just want to point out that this was the same position taken by your colleagues at New York Presbyterian when they refused to be part of the WTC Health Program

Network and would only allow access to their facilities and their personnel by use of cumbersome single case agreements as well.

Below are just some of the news articles and editorials on the position that New York Presbyterian took denying 911 responders and survivors easy access to health care and as you can see, after public pressure, they relented and are now part of the WTC Health Program Network.

“Doing right by the heroes: NewYork-Presbyterian fixes its policies toward 9/11 responders and victims” NY Daily News, April 22, 2022.

“NewYork-Presbyterian finally agrees to accept World Trade Center Health Plan for 9/11 survivors” NY Daily News, April 21, 2022.

“Do no harm: NewYork-Presbyterian owes 9/11 health victims better treatment” NY Daily News, April 16, 2022.

“Ground Zero survivors battle New York-Presbyterian Hospital which won’t accept 9/11 Health Program” NY Daily News, April 14, 2022.

“NYC HOSPITAL DOESN’T TAKE FEDERAL PAYMENTS TO TREAT SICK 9/11 FIRST RESPONDERS” NY Daily News, August 23, 2021.

You can visit our website here at <https://www.911healthwatch.org/ny-presbyterian-denies-easy-access-to-its-services-for-9-11-responders-and-survivors/>, to read the full story of what happened with NY Presbyterian and how they finally relented and no longer demand single case agreements.

I hope that the Westchester Medical Center Health Care System can take immediate action to reverse this decision and stay in the World Trade Center Health Program Network as soon as possible so that the health care of 911 responders and survivors will not be adversely impacted.

Sincerely,



Benjamin Chevat
Executive Director

cc. Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor
Honorable George Latimer, Westchester County Executive