



Making Health Equality a Reality

Contact: Maxine Golub (REACH)
Phone: 212-633-0800 ext. 1286
Cell: 917-848-4006

Contact: Nisha Agarwal (NYLPI)
Phone: 212-244-4664 ext. 353
Cell: 718-986-1552

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: June 9, 2008

HUNDREDS OF BRONX RESIDENTS, RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS, HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND HEALTH ADVOCATES RALLIED TO END DISCRIMINATION IN HEALTH CARE

COMMUNITY-BASED COALITION ANNOUNCED FILING OF A CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINT AGAINST THREE MAJOR MEDICAL CENTERS IN NEW YORK CITY; ALLEGE SEGREGATION IN OUTPATIENT HEALTH CARE

BRONX, NY: Bronx Health REACH, a coalition committed to eliminating racial disparities in health care, filed a complaint this morning with the New York State Attorney General's Office. A rally to announce this event was held on the steps of Bronx Borough Hall. Coalition members from numerous Bronx congregations and community groups attended and offered personal testimony.

Bronx Health REACH was formed in 1999 to examine the causes of racial disparities in health outcomes and develop strategies to eliminate them. For several years now, REACH has been particularly concerned that voluntary teaching hospitals in New York City operate their ambulatory and specialty care systems in a way that segregates patients based on source of payment. This practice also has a discriminatory impact on the basis of race and ethnicity.

The complaint, filed by New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) on behalf of Bronx Health REACH, documents how private hospitals in New York City operate two separate and unequal systems of outpatient care within the same health facility, in violation of federal and local civil rights laws.

Bronx Health REACH conducted a telephone survey of several major medical centers in New York City that are important providers of specialty care to community residents. Two different specialty services at each hospital were surveyed. Surveyors found that patients with private insurance were referred to faculty practice offices, but Medicaid patients were systematically referred to the hospital's specialty clinics, where they receive more fragmented care from less experienced doctors. REACH also conducted several extensive interviews with patients who have experience with the separate and unequal outpatient health system.

"In short, what we've found includes pervasive segregation of care, based on the insurance status of people in the community. As blacks and Latinos are two to three times more likely to be uninsured or publicly insured, there is a close link between race, ethnicity and insurance status. This results in the systematic channeling of whites and minorities into different systems of care and these systems are not of equal quality or equally accessible," said **Neil Calman, M.D., president of the Institute for Family Health, and principal investigator for Bronx Health REACH.** "In October, 2005, we called it Medical Apartheid because it separates people by race and has the same deadly effect as apartheid in other settings. We are filing this complaint now because the

system is not improving on its own and it is time for this to stop before more people get sicker and die as a result of this discrimination."

"The complaint filed this morning documents specific findings of system-wide policies and practices contributing to the segregation of care," remarked **Nisha Agarwal, a staff attorney and Skadden Fellow at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**. "This is in direct conflict with federal and local civil rights laws, which state that patients have a right to receive treatment without discrimination as to race, color, national origin and source of payment."

Vanessa Ghighotty, a cancer patient explained, "I joined this effort because I do not believe Medicaid patients should receive second class health care. My own cancer diagnosis and treatment was delayed and disrupted numerous times due to problems with my Medicaid managed care plan. As a result, I was shuffled between the clinic and the emergency room. Now I am an advocate with a national organization for cancer patients, and I see that there is a totally different world of care for patients with private insurance. It shouldn't be that way."

Another Bronx resident and patient, Zoraima Rodriguez said: "I think there is an attitude in the health care system that, because you are poor and you are on Medicaid, you have to put up with unequal care and you have no right to complain. I'm glad this rally is happening and that we are challenging those views. Being treated with dignity should not depend on the type of health insurance you have."

Bronx Health REACH, established in 1999, includes 40 community and faith-based organizations dedicated to eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities in health outcomes. In addition to its advocacy efforts, the group sponsors community health promotion and disease prevention programs, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and the NYS Department of Health. REACH is a project of the Institute for Family Health, a nonprofit organization that operates health centers and trains health professionals to work in urban, medically underserved communities in New York State. New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) is a nonprofit civil rights law firm that strives for social justice. NYLPI has worked with the Coalition on this issue for several years.

These organizations have signed on in support of this campaign:

Abundance Life Tabernacle, Inc. • Bethlehem Judah Missionary Baptist Church • Bronx Westchester AHEC • The Bronx Defenders • Bronx Health Link • Bronx Sheperds • Center for the Independence of the Disabled in New York • Church of Christ the King • Church Alive Development Corporation • Columbia Human Rights Clinic Concerned Residents Organization • Cosmopolitan Church of the Lord Jesus • Groundswell Project at King of Glory Tabernacle Church • Highbridge Community Life Center • Iglesia First Pentecostal Church of Jerome • Institute for Family Health • The Latino Education Project • Leukemia and Lymphoma Society • MARC Academy and Family Center • Metro NY Health Care for All Campaign • Misión San Juan Bautista • Mount Hermon Baptist Church • Neighborhood SHOPP • New York Immigration Coalition • New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) • Nos Quedamos • Grand Concourse Seventh Day Adventist Church • Sikh Coalition • Temple of the Living God • Urban Justice Center • Walker Memorial Baptist Church • World Evangelical Deliverance Center
List in formation as of 6/9/08

