

September 28, 2020

Housestaff Association  
John H. Stroger Hospital of Cook County  
Chicago IL

To whom it may concern:

We, the Pediatric residents of John H. Stroger Hospital, are reaching out to the Housestaff Association for help and guidance in regards to the situation our department is currently facing: the Pediatric Ward at Stroger Hospital is under threat of closure "due to low volume", as stated in the proposed budget for 2021.

While it is true that the pediatric ward's volume has been low due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our department remains committed to Cook County's mission statement: "to deliver integrated health services with dignity and respect regardless of a patient's ability to pay." As the safety net for Cook County's underserved and underprivileged, shutting down the pediatric ward runs contrary to our mission statement; should it actually close, the same populations we have vowed to serve and advocate for would ultimately have healthcare placed beyond their reach, further exacerbating the current cycle of poverty and adversity they face.

However, setting aside the ethical considerations of our duty to our patients, there are also financial reasons to be concerned about this decision. First of all, we currently do not know the effect this decision will have on our pediatric population and potential admissions, from an administrative point of view. Should patients arrive at the ER and require admission, they will either be redirected to other hospitals, or be admitted to the PICU; both options could generate conflict with insurance companies, and should they refuse to cover either option, could lead to increased overhead costs for Cook County. In addition, there are many patients that we find have County Care health insurance, but are seen at many other facilities in the city. These monies are being given away to other institutions to provide a service that Stroger Hospital can deliver. Perhaps, efforts should be made to keep these patients within our system so as to simultaneously increase patient volume, and reduce Cook County's financial burden. Additionally, Stroger Hospital currently has 12 residents in our Pediatrics program, and 36 residents in our Family Medicine program; all of us are required to complete several months of clinical rotations in the Pediatric Wards for ACGME accreditation in our respective programs. Should the pediatric ward close, Cook County will be forced to outsource our education, and form additional institutional agreements with other hospitals, so as to maintain ACGME standards. These agreements involve considerable costs to cover the resources necessary for the other hospital to properly serve and educate our residents. However, it is arguable that these resources can be better invested in Stroger itself. In a worst case scenario that these agreements fail to materialize, one question remains: what would happen to Cook County's Pediatrics Residency program?

So ultimately, the point that we are trying to make is that closing the pediatric ward would be counterproductive, as it would compromise healthcare for our population without providing the financial relief that Cook County needs. We are reaching out to the House Staff Association out of concern for our patients, our residency program's future, and for guidance on how to further proceed in order to present our case to the administration, and hopefully, avoid the closure of our ward.

Sincerely,

The Pediatric Residents of Stroger Hospital