



COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA



LOCAL 1168, AFL-CIO



Broken Promises to the Community

The Wettlaufer clinic was founded over 100 years ago. It is the only setting where patients can receive outpatient and surgical care in the same setting. On a daily basis patients are brought to the clinic from the Emergency Room and via stretchers from Nursing Homes. They receive referrals from all the large primary care practices in the city as well as the Buffalo General Hospital Outpatients physicians. In his time alone in this eye clinic, Dr. Rodman has seen over 125,000 patients and performed over 5000 surgeries. The clinic last year saw over 6000 patients. Many members of our community owe their very sight to this department.

The physicians and the staff of this Buffalo General Clinic take care of the ophthalmological needs of the people of Buffalo and the surrounding areas that otherwise would have nowhere else to go. Hidden away on the 5th floor of the building, this staff struggled with little or no help from the administration for decades, and out dated equipment. But they did it, and did it very well through sheer will power and the determination of a core group of dedicated physicians and staff.

On Friday, May 14th the members in this department and the union met with the management team and Human Resources to be told that Kaleida is simply getting out of the business. The union first heard about the closure of the clinic through our members. Denise Fitzgerald-Bergen, Senior Director of Ambulatory Services stated that when she came on board 3 months ago, the decision had already been made to shut down the service. At the very same time, our members had been given a tour of their "new department". The physicians and this union have been given different reasons, at different times as to why the clinic is closing. First, it was because the equipment was old, and too costly to replace. When we were able to prove that false, we were told that it is a matter of space. If that is true, then, it really is directly related to the Berger recommendations. This is simply not acceptable.

This is not about our members alone. Because of the contract, they will have options. How sad that some of the patients will not. We have been told that the needs of the patients will be met someplace else. However the truth is patients do not have insurance, or are under insured, might not. Who will take care of those patients coming in through the ER? This is just another example of Kaleida letting the ball drop for those in the most need in this community. The Union received a call from a patient who is a patient of the eye clinic who has diabetic retinopathy. He lost his job as in 2008. He has no health insurance. He is not eligible for Family Health Plus. He received sight saving laser surgery. He is concerned because if the Wettlaufer closes, he will have no place to go. How many other patients are out there like this? Part of the Berger commission's recommendation was for the development of "Medical Homes". This is a kind of one stop shopping center for outpatient services that provides preventative care. We believe this can and should be developed within Kaleida. We are willing to work with administration to get this done. The hospital has said there is no interest in this. While Kaleida jumped on the band wagon for the closure of Millard Fillmore Gates, and the development of the GVI, they seemed to have forgotten about this recommendation coming out of Berger.

How can Kaleida say they have a Mission Statement to serve the community and then move forward with this closure? Kaleida has told the Union that the Eye Clinic is not a "Core" service, and therefore, not in the plans. It seems the patients who are seen in this clinic are not in Kaleida plans either. The GVI is being touted as the next Cleveland Clinic, with patients coming from all over the county, which is a wonderful thing for this area. This is being done by putting people in this community at risk! At the end of the day, the administrative team will walk away saying they did great things. And at the end of the day, people could suffer who don't have to. We have been talking to community leaders and elected officials and will do everything in our power to try to stop this, but we need your help. Call Kaleida administration, (Larry Zielinski), and demand them to stop this. Let him know we do not think this community should be forgotten. Every patient and all their needs should be part of the core plan.