

May 17, 2020

An Open Letter to Jeffrey A. Flaks, President and Chief Executive Officer of Hartford HealthCare

As you wrote in an op-ed for this weekend's Hartford Courant, "each crisis presents unique opportunities," which "we would be foolish to squander."

We hope your staff has shared with you the opportunity that Hartford Healthcare has to do the right thing and provide non-discriminatory care to people with disabilities during the coronavirus crisis, but if not, my family and I send you this Open Letter so that appropriate action can be taken and an opportunity not squandered.

Over a month ago, disability advocates in Connecticut wrote to Governor Lamont and the Department of Public Health letting them know that people with disabilities were suffering in hospitals because they were not allowed to bring support persons with them due to strict "no-visitor" policies. But the Governor and the Department of Public Health failed to provide necessary statewide guidance, which led to a formal complaint being filed against the State by Disability Rights Connecticut and partner organizations with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and a subsequent complaint now being investigated by the Boston Regional OCR against Hartford Hospital.

Each complaint describes an ongoing situation with our 73-year-old wife and mother, "Patient G.S.," who arrived at Hartford Hospital on April 19 alone, unable to communicate, and with severe short term memory loss. Unfortunately, weeks of negotiations with Hartford Hospital representatives and an attempt at mediation have failed to secure the reasonable accommodations G.S. needs to understand and benefit from her medical care. Even though other states and hospitals around the country make disability-related exceptions to their "no-visitor" policies if the patient needs a support person to communicate or otherwise access medical care, Hartford Hospital steadfastly refuses to make a similar accommodation for Patient G.S. Without consistent access to her communication, memory, and emotional support system, there have been numerous misunderstandings and missteps in her care, leading to G.S. being confused, frightened, and unnecessarily restrained, both physically and chemically.

Given your interest, as stated in the op-ed, for "a health system that is more equitable" it is alarming that your own flagship hospital is denying its patients with disabilities equity in treatment.

We have spent nearly four weeks trying to ensure our loved one has a trained and familiar support person beside her to help her understand and benefit from the same medical treatment the hospital provides to non-disabled patients. We do not want to pursue complaints to enforce her right to access the same caliber and quality of care others receive. Rather, our preference is for Hartford Hospital, and the State of Connecticut, to take all steps necessary to put in place policies that assure individuals with disabilities are granted their right to equal access to proper medical care and treatment, as has been done in other states such as New York and New Jersey, and in some hospitals within Connecticut, such as Danbury Hospital.

If you would do that Mr. Flaks, then we could return to our most important priority; caring full-time for G.S. and making sure she comes home to us as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

The husband and children of "G.S."

REFERENCE: "In health care, there's no going back to the time before coronavirus. It's time for a new - and better - normal" by Jeffrey A. Flaks; [Hartford Courant](#), May 15, 2020