



**New York City Council Hearing**

**Oversight:**

**Addressing the Healthcare Staffing Crisis - Examining Residency  
Conditions and Worker Concerns**

**Committee on Hospitals**

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Good morning Chairwoman Narcisse and members of the Committee on Hospitals. I am Eric Wei, Senior Vice President and Chief Quality Officer at New York City Health and Hospitals (Health + Hospitals) and I also practice as an emergency medicine doctor across every Emergency Department in our system. I am joined this morning by Dr. Donnie Bell, System Deputy Chief Medical Officer and practicing neuroendovascular surgeon at Kings County. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the residency programs at Health + Hospitals. While our health system represents just one facet of the broader healthcare delivery system and workforce landscape in our city, we take pride in what we do. Our resident and fellow colleagues are essential members of our care team, enabling us to uphold the tradition of teaching in medicine and fulfill our mission of providing all New Yorkers with the opportunity to live their healthiest lives, regardless of background or means. Our trainees, who share our values and mission, consistently deliver high-quality, compassionate care to our patients, serving as a crucial source of healthcare staffing across the Health + Hospitals system.

Health + Hospitals is proud to host a large graduate medical education program for over 2,400 trainee FTEs across our 11 acute care facilities and Gouverneur Diagnostic & Treatment Center. We offer residency and clinical fellowships in dozens of specialty and subspecialty fields, including anesthesiology, cardiology, emergency medicine, geriatrics, internal medicine, obstetrics-gynecology, pediatrics, and psychiatry. Furthermore, we host hundreds of medical students for their third and fourth year rotations and we also offer an internship program for third- or fourth-year medical school students to experience our mission at Health + Hospitals as part of our MOSAIC pathway program. There are over 70 Health + Hospitals-sponsored training programs, and we participate in over

340 different Graduate Medical Education programs. In addition to our own sponsored programs, we work with 13 other sponsoring institutions and 7 medical school partners.

With a notable increase in providers leaving or retiring and a widespread shortage of health professionals nationwide, including at Health + Hospitals, improving recruitment efforts is now essential. At Health + Hospitals, we recently established a Recruitment Office, dedicated to attracting new talent and retaining our resident and fellow colleagues. Alongside our affiliates, we have organized job fairs tailored to our residents and fellows. Moreover, our training program faculty serve as mentors, guiding trainees in career planning, helping them secure fellowships, and maintaining post-residency/fellowship relationships to facilitate recruitment back to our health system. Many of our trainees gain additional training at some of the country's top fellowship programs including NYU, Mt. Sinai, Cornell, Columbia, Massachusetts General Hospital, Cleveland Clinic and UCLA just to name a few. Notably, approximately 20% of the attending medical staff at Health + Hospitals are graduates of our residency training programs.

We also recognize that residency and fellowship can be demanding, juggling personal well-being, family, finances, clinical duties, and continuous learning. Personally, residency was by the far the hardest thing I have ever done and I believe most physicians feel the same way. Therefore, it is crucial that we foster a supportive clinical learning environment. We offer a suite of wellness resources and activities, such as resident wellness workgroups, dedicated spaces and retreats, social events, and our Helping Healers Heal (H3) program to address work-related stressors. Additionally, our programs include research fairs, AMA membership,

educational content, leadership opportunities, and avenues for trainees to voice concerns safely.

Knowing the toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on physicians and residents, Health + Hospitals developed a comprehensive workforce wellness strategy in 2020. This proactive approach has been maintained to address the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, aiming to increase awareness of mental health issues, improve access to resources, encourage help-seeking behavior, and enhance overall satisfaction with resources and working conditions. As part of this strategy, Health + Hospitals has bolstered its Helping Healers Heal (H3) programming, which includes resources such as an anonymous internal support hotline, individual and group peer support sessions, and mandatory annual training for DIOs/GME Leaders, Residency Program Directors, and Coordinators, all aimed at addressing the emotional and psychological needs of our healthcare workforce. Furthermore, Health + Hospitals launched a House Staff Wellness website in 2021, providing mental health resources and support hotlines for all staff regardless of academic affiliation or pay line. Additionally, Health + Hospitals added behavioral health services to our Virtual ExpressCare service line, allowing 24/7 access to mental health services via telehealth. This is also available to all Health + Hospitals staff and has been utilized by trainees.

In late 2020, Health + Hospitals introduced Staff Wellness Surveys as a vital tool, revealing critical insights into our wellness initiatives. The survey indicated that residents and fellows were unaware of our H3 programming and were experiencing significant levels of stress and burnout. In response, system leadership established a dedicated support model for all house staff, in alignment

with ACGME requirements. This model aims to provide resources, reduce mental health stigma, and encourage a culture of seeking support within our healthcare workforce. Moving forward, we will continue to utilize these surveys to inform and enhance our support mechanisms, ensuring the well-being of our staff remains a top priority.

Health + Hospitals has taken specific steps to address the epidemic of physician suicide, recognizing that physicians have one of the highest suicide rates among all professions. National Physician Suicide Day, observed on September 17, serves as a call to action to prevent suicide by promoting awareness, initiating conversations, understanding underlying barriers, and sharing resources for those in distress to seek mental health care. This year, we organized two virtual events aimed at shedding light on physician suicide and destigmatizing its existence within the healthcare landscape at Health + Hospitals. Additionally, we hosted a resident-only panel focusing on reducing mental health stigma, promoting mindset and self-care, and reflecting on residency life.

To further support residents, we have developed a Crisis Support Action Plan, which is now integrated with the use of the Integrated Screening Program (ISP). The ISP, created by the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, allows residents and fellows to complete a self-guided questionnaire in a safe and anonymous manner. Through the ISP website, participants can anonymously assess stress, depression, and other mental health concerns, receive personalized responses from an H3 Peer Support Champion, exchange messages with the Peer Support Champion, ask questions, learn about mental health services, and be connected to these services.

We are proud of our efforts to enhance resident wellbeing, but we also recognize the need for ongoing improvement. To address resident concerns effectively, we have established a standardized quality assurance workflow. This process involves regular meetings between residency programs, their direct leadership, facility leadership, and systemwide leaders. These meetings aim to address complaints or operational challenges, discuss high-level operational barriers, and work collaboratively to resolve issues.

Additionally, the Health + Hospitals Resident Working Conditions and Wellbeing Taskforce, comprising system leadership and wellness champions, meets quarterly to drive resident and fellow wellness strategy across the system. This taskforce organizes biannual systemwide Residency Working Conditions and Wellness Calls, along with ad-hoc facility-specific meetings as needed. These calls include CEOs, CMOs, CNOs, DIOs, other facility stakeholders, and the CIR to ensure alignment of efforts, transparency in issue resolution, tracking of monitored trends, and sharing of strategies and best practices. The Resident/House Staff Wellness Workgroup, consisting of representatives from our facilities and Central Office divisions, is dedicated to assessing current state needs and gaps in resident wellbeing. This group identifies solutions that may evolve into future initiatives or programs. Continuously seeking feedback from our trainees, we are committed to enhancing the clinical learning environment with the aim of fostering a future where our trainees become valued faculty colleagues.

We take pride in Health + Hospitals' role in training a significant portion of the nation's doctors. While we would be honored to retain every resident within our system after they complete their residencies, we understand that various

factors may lead residents to leave our system and New York City (NYC). There are system factors such as the number of attending lines being fewer than resident and fellow lines and we pride ourselves on high retention rates of our attending physicians. There are also personal factors such as fellowship, attending opportunities outside of NYC for our residents and fellows and/or their significant others, desire to be closer to family and friends while starting or growing their own families, and geographic preference. The high cost of living in NYC poses recruitment challenges. Additionally, fellowships are highly competitive and utilize a match system similar to residency where a computer system determines the highest match between resident and program rankings to make a match. This means residents have to apply broadly across the country and be willing to move where they match.

Safety net hospitals, like Health + Hospitals, often face challenges in competing with private and for-profit hospitals in terms of healthcare workforce salaries due to our payer mix. Despite this, we prioritize offering a comprehensive range of additional benefits unique to public and non-profit health systems like ours. We also advocate for additional funding to support these critical programs. This includes our participation in initiatives such as the National Health Service Corps loan repayment program and the Doctors Across New York program. Within our system, we are proud to have launched the Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program (BH4NYC), aimed at engaging highly talented and motivated behavioral health staff. This program offers \$30,000 to \$50,000 in debt relief to various behavioral health clinicians, including Psychiatrists, Psychiatric Physician Assistants, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners, Licensed Clinical Psychologists, and Licensed

Clinical Social Workers, in exchange for a three-year commitment to serve Health + Hospitals.

At Health + Hospitals, our mission is to provide high-quality health services with compassion, dignity, and respect to everyone, without exception. We deeply appreciate and take pride in the daily efforts of our residents and fellows to further this mission. In turn, we are dedicated to supporting them day in and day out as the health of our communities and great city are in the hands of the future generations of clinicians and clinical leaders that come out of our training programs. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify and for your continued support of Health + Hospitals. I look forward to our continued partnership and am happy to answer any questions you may have.