



**New York City Council Hearing**

**Oversight:**

**Health + Hospitals Doctors Council Work Stoppage**

**Committee on Hospitals**

**Committee on Health**

**Committee on Civil Service and Labor**

**Mitchell Katz, MD**

**President & CEO**

**NYC Health + Hospitals**

**January 10, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Narcisse, Chairwoman Schulman, Chairwoman De La Rosa, members of the Committees on Hospitals, Health, and Civil Service and Labor, and members of the City Council. I am Dr. Mitch Katz, a practicing primary care physician and the President and CEO of NYC Health + Hospitals (Health + Hospitals). Thank you for holding this important hearing this afternoon.

I am here today to discuss the long-standing and vital partnerships between Health + Hospitals and its affiliated voluntary hospitals, and how these affiliations enhance our ability to deliver high-quality healthcare to New Yorkers and address the challenges we face. Most importantly, I am here to reinforce our commitment to our physicians.

As you may know, we employ the majority of our physicians through contracts with 4 major health care affiliates. Relatively few of our doctors are employed by Health + Hospitals directly. That does not change our commitment or responsibility to our physician colleagues, but it may be helpful for you to understand our system.

This is not a new structure: as early as 1961, the City established partnerships with private, not-for-profit hospitals – sometimes known as voluntary hospitals – to ensure that public hospitals maintained an adequate number of attending physicians.

The concept of utilizing private sector resources in public health is not unique to New York City. In cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco, public hospitals have successfully employed affiliate agreements with private voluntary hospitals. These partnerships have proven effective in addressing staffing shortages and improving

service delivery, demonstrating that collaboration can amplify the strengths of both sectors.

No matter who employs our doctors technically, Health + Hospitals is committed to supporting them. Physicians are integral to our mission and vision. We recognize the vital role our doctors play in delivering exceptional care, and we strive to provide a comprehensive suite of resources designed to foster their well-being.

Since I joined Health + Hospitals in 2018, we have taken a variety of steps to support our doctors emotionally, professionally, and in their day-to-day practice. We initiated a number of wellness programs when I joined the system. One of my first actions was to create Helping Healers Heal (or H3), a specialized program to directly address the challenge of work-related stress and secondary trauma. The need for H3 and other supports became even more important during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

During that horrible time, we initiated a range of supports for our physicians and staff. We created a dedicated behavioral health hotline for our staff; developed wellness rounds to check on our physicians and other staff on the floors; offered necessary resources like meals, childcare, clean scrubs, transportation, hotels, groceries and other personal essentials; brought in external counselors to provide parenting coaching; offered transcendental meditation; and made trained peers available for staff “debriefs” to help our heroes process the burdens of their work without stigma. We also created dedicated wellness rooms for decompression in our facilities, which we are now enhancing with generous private donations.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested our healthcare system in unimaginable ways, and at the heart of that response were the doctors who worked tirelessly to care for our patients. Their heroic efforts on the frontlines went far beyond the call of duty, and their commitment to patient care and unwavering service deserves our deepest gratitude. I would like to use this moment to again thank all of our doctors for their bravery and selflessness.

Following the profound toll the COVID-19 pandemic took on physicians and healthcare workforce, Health + Hospitals maintained and bolstered our comprehensive workforce wellness strategy, making it an even richer part of our general operations. Our system's Chief Wellness Officer and his team focus on increasing awareness of mental health issues, enhancing access to critical resources, encouraging help-seeking behavior, and improving overall satisfaction with both resources and working conditions. We also continue to offer our enhanced Helping Healers Heal (H3) program, which includes vital resources such as an anonymous internal support hotline and individualized and group peer support sessions. These initiatives are specifically designed to address the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of our healthcare providers.

To ensure broad accessibility, Health + Hospitals launched the House Staff Wellness website in 2021, offering comprehensive mental health resources and support hotlines to all staff, regardless of academic affiliation or pay line.

Additionally, Health + Hospitals expanded its commitment to mental health by incorporating behavioral health services into our Virtual ExpressCare platform, providing 24/7 access to mental health care through telehealth. This service is

available to all Health + Hospitals staff, ensuring that our workforce has immediate access to critical mental health support when they need it most. We also have an on demand 24/7 virtual clinic for urgent behavioral health needs for our team members who may need ongoing care.

On a day to day basis, we prioritize listening to our staff. We hold town halls both with our physicians and with our full teams, seeking open dialogue and collaboration. Through regular surveys and working groups, we actively solicit feedback from our physicians, which directly informs our operational strategies. This responsiveness has led to tangible, actionable changes that we continue to build and enhance.

Our commitment goes beyond wellness. We offer a robust array of professional development opportunities, including research fairs, AMA membership, cutting-edge educational content, and leadership training, all designed to empower our physicians at every stage of their career. In addition, we provide numerous channels for staff to raise concerns safely and constructively, through their supervisors, our physician councils, our systemwide patient safety program, or our compliance program

I recognize that our physicians are seeking compensation as well as supportive resources. It is no secret that safety net hospitals, like Health + Hospitals, often face challenges in competing with private hospitals and certainly with out-of-state for-profit hospitals in terms of healthcare workforce salaries due to our payer mix and limited reimbursement. Unlike many of our peer systems, we are not driven by

revenue and thus we do not compensate our physicians based on the money they make for us.

However, there have been substantial investments in physician salaries to remain competitive, and the current salary average is over \$265,000. In addition, Health + Hospitals prioritizes offering a comprehensive range of additional benefits unique to public and non-profit health systems like ours.

We also leverage funding and programming to help our physicians with student debt. 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), funded by generous private donations, and aimed at engaging highly talented and motivated behavioral health staff. This program offers psychiatrist up to \$75,000 in debt relief in exchange for a three-year commitment to serve Health + Hospitals.

We are also always looking for opportunities to make more resources available to our physician and staff, including for our ongoing advocacy to increase Medicaid rates through State and Federal partnerships, seek more advantageous commercial contracts, and garner donations including from generous elected leaders like you.

Through these multifaceted efforts, Health + Hospitals remains resolute in its mission to support the mental, emotional, and psychological well-being of our healthcare providers, recognizing that their health is essential to the continued success of our organization and the quality of care we deliver to our communities. At Health + Hospitals, we are not only dedicated to the health of our patients, but equally committed to the health of those who care for them.

I am pleased that we were able to work together and reach agreement for the physicians directly employed by the city recently, and I am grateful for your support in that process. I am confident that we can work together to get the same kind of positive conclusion for our affiliate physicians. Thank you for your time and consideration and for your support for our physicians. I am happy to take any questions you have.