



SHARE CHA
PRO PATIENT PRO UNION

An Open Letter to the CHA Community

It is a joy to announce the formation of our new union!

Our Hospital, Our Community

We are the caregivers you know and work with every day. We are physician associates, attending physicians, and psychologists. We choose to work at Cambridge Health Alliance because we love the mission. We provide healthcare for all—for newly-arrived immigrant families, lifelong area residents, and those who can't get care elsewhere. Many of us and our families receive our care here. Every day, we commit ourselves to improving access, while pursuing health equity and better outcomes for all patients. We have a clear vision of what CHA could be when we participate as decision-making equals. We are choosing to form our union for this very reason, to make this vision a reality.

We are a tight-knit network of colleagues and friends. We respect and care for each other. As coworkers, we rely on one another so that we can be confident that the patients we know and love are getting the best possible care. We need to support ourselves and our families, but money is not our top priority. There are lots of good-paying jobs out there now, and we choose to stay at CHA. The strength of our institution comes from our shared purpose, from the consistent heart and thoughtfulness that we all dedicate to the CHA cause.

Creating Our Future through Our Union

We choose to form a clinician union so that we can be at the table and participate as equals in making decisions about our work and patient care—from the day-to-day, to the big picture.

Forming a union is not about making a list of demands, it's about demanding to be at the table. We want to develop a participatory culture, within and across departments. We seek to create a constructive and cooperative union-management relationship where we can continuously problem solve and improve our systems. We look forward to working with all our colleagues, other CHA unions, and to welcoming the voices of our patients.

Building consensus is an everyday practice and no small task. We must listen to each other with mutual respect, and we must all speak as equals in decision making. Through cooperation and a shared commitment to process improvement, we can eliminate long-standing problems and address new challenges.

A Challenging Landscape

Community healthcare is inherently challenging work. External pressures are real, and relentless—there aren't enough resources to do what needs to be done for all our patients. We have seen what happens when administrators and their consultants decide without us how to best deliver patient care. Every week there's something new. Without the true engagement of front-line clinicians, we risk patient harm and threaten our well-being as caregivers.

These top-down changes create a more harried and discombobulated workflow, pull us apart from one another, make it difficult to work at the top of our licenses, and take key autonomous clinical decisions out of our hands. When we take on the work to connect the pieces ourselves, like making sure a patient finds the appropriate care, we use non-existent time in our workday or family time at home. The alternative is to turn away, focus on the next waiting patient, and hope things turn out all right. We face this moral hazard multiple times daily, making the impossible decision of how much extra we can give from our already exhausted selves.

Our Path for Moving Forward

Forming our union is our decision. Democracy at work is something we all cherish, and CHA should embrace it. Everyday negotiation and everyday problem solving, in good faith and with creativity, are the cornerstones of that democracy. We agree to listen to each other persistently, and to pay careful attention to every voice. Everyone should be safe to participate freely in discussions about our future, without repercussions or retaliation.

We want to build a constructive relationship. We know that our new relationship with CHA management will be best developed with ongoing guidance by talented mediators—people who believe in constructive collaboration, and who have the professional skills to help us make legalism and adversarialism unnecessary.

An Invitation

We are eager to form our union so that we can become full partners in guiding CHA into the future. We hope you will be part of this ongoing conversation with us whether you are our patients, colleagues, neighbors, other CHA unions, area legislators, our board of trustees, or medical and operational leadership at all levels.

Our CHA community has weathered hard challenges. At our best, we've done this with joy and a clear-eyed, optimistic spirit. We seek to maintain that spirit in a more consistent and continuous way, with an open invitation to all who care about our mission to serve our patients and community with the utmost respect.