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UI HEALTH OCCUPATIONAL & PHYSICAL THERAPISTS BEING INFECTED BY COVID-19

Workers filed complaint with Illinois Department of Labor, UIC does not make corrections to protect employee health

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On June 8, 2020, UI Health Occupational and Physical Therapists filed a complaint with Illinois Department of Labor OSHA due to safety concerns and lack of PPE.

Chicago - University of Illinois Hospital and Health Sciences Systems Occupational and Physical Therapists, represented by SEIU Local 73, are being infected by COVID-19 within patient care. UIH Physical and Occupational Therapists have taken action by meeting with CDC official to determine safety needs where guidance was lacking. They have requested N95 masks, but have only been provided surgical masks for treating patients who are not on COVID-19 specific floors despite evidence that surgical masks provide only 67% protection from covid19.

At least three Therapists are now COVID-19 positive after working on NON-COVID patient care units. A complaint was filed with the Illinois Department of Labor OSHA. Based on the complaint, an off-site investigation was to be conducted. UI Health was requested to perform a self audit of the alleged hazardous conditions and make any necessary corrections or modifications to protect employee health by June 15, 2020. The deadline has passed and UIH FAILED TO RESPOND. UIH ADMINISTRATION DRAGS THEIR FEET WHILE EMPLOYEE INFECTIONS CONTINUE TO RISE AND EMPLOYEES DIE.

"They call us heroes for being healthcare workers but the truth is we are people who are afraid for our lives and we don't have faith that our leadership has prioritized our safety. We have seen three of our coworkers die and at least 259 of us become infected. We wonder who is next. We believe N95 masks could have prevented some of these deaths and many of these infections," says Occupational Therapist Cathleen Jensen.

In order to begin addressing this dangerous situation, SEIU Local 73 is demanding:

- Universal PPE standards for all UI Health workers with N95 masks as minimum protection in patient care areas.
- Free COVID-19 testing of all UI Health workers whether symptomatic or not on a bi-weekly basis throughout the duration of this pandemic.
- All workers who can perform their job duties from home will be allowed to work from home.

"I prefer working in the COVID floors because I am provided with an N95, scrubs, hair net, gown, and shoe covers. The PPE provided in the COVID floors makes me feel safe. When I work in the other floors I feel vulnerable to getting sick because I don't feel protected. I see my coworkers getting sick from working in the non COVID floors. I worry that I will be next," said another Occupational Therapist at UI Health

"Essential workers are risking their lives. Proper PPE will save them. We make these demands so there will be no more deaths of UIC workers. We must protect those who are saving the lives of our family and community. It should not be demanded, it should be given," said Dian Palmer, SEIU Local 73 President

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SEIU Local 73 represents more than 29,000 workers, primarily in public service and publicly funded positions in school districts, municipalities, social service agencies, and many other job classifications in Illinois and Indiana. We are dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families.