

Protecting People & Health Care in Western North Carolina

The North Carolina Department of Justice has been investigating HCA Healthcare to ensure that it upheld the agreement it signed when it purchased Mission Hospital in 2019. Since 2019, we have received more than 500 complaints from people who are concerned about health care access and quality in western North Carolina. Below are excerpts from some of those complaints that illustrate the claims in our lawsuit against HCA.

In Their Own Words: Harm Caused by Deteriorating Emergency Department

- “I was taken by ambulance to Mission Hospital emergency room. I never got into the ER because the paramedics literally couldn't get my gurney in the door. The entrance and hallways were jammed with gurneys...elderly people having trouble breathing, people bleeding, and no one helping them. I was dumped into a folding wheelchair in the triage area. I never saw an RN. I was not physically examined by the doctor who saw me for three minutes and ordered tests. I got an ultrasound and CT scan and blood work. The doctor claimed he could not find anything wrong with me. **I was in terrible pain throughout my seven-hour ordeal. The people of this community deserve better than this.**”
- “My 74-year-old husband was in the Mission Health ER [on a Friday night]. He has had multiple concussions since 1997 and can have seizures from that. He carries prescribed medication with him to stop seizures. He was treated massively abusively. He was strapped to a table so tightly in six places it restricted blood flow, and he could hardly move at all. He had no access to any kind of bathroom, and ended up wetting the bed, and was left in the wet bed. The next morning, he managed to get the straps off, and get dressed. **I was talking on the phone with a doctor who was to give me an update, and the doctor said he's in holding in the ER, then looked around and said, "He's gone! We'll have to try and find him!" My husband began to walk around Asheville, and being a lifelong athlete, literally walked 30 or 40 miles trying to get to our home.** He was finally able to reach me with a borrowed phone, and had had NO food in the ER, so he was hypoglycemic.”
- “My husband had a stroke over a year ago and still cannot walk. The past month he can't stand or walk at all he's paralyzed from the waist down and he finally was worse Friday and I called 911 for an ambulance. I arrived at Mission about 45 minutes later to get a pass to go in the back to him and they said he's in the waiting room. **I could not believe it when I found him sitting in a chair and he can hardly sit up he said, "I fell out of the chair here a while ago." They had helped him back up. I went straight to the front desk to ask what was going on they said there are no beds in the back and patients are being brought in from the ambulances to the waiting room.** After being in there about an hour I did see them bringing patients in on a stretcher and helping them off to chairs. How is this possible when they are brought in an ambulance. Then it took us 17 hours later he finally got to a room. We have to have some help here at this hospital for the patients coming in and our whole community. **This is not what our Mission Hospital had always been. We are at a loss here and need help.**”
- “We have lived in Asheville for 20 years and one of the primary reasons was the abundance of good healthcare. We are appalled with what we've seen and read about Mission. **While on chemo, I spiked a temperature of 103 and had to go to an ER. My doctor called Mission and the approximate wait time was 7 hours.** At Advent it was 5 minutes; however, we had to drive an extra 10-15 miles. [Advent] provided immediate care and started to diagnose the cause. When a bed opened at Mission, I was taken by ambulance to Mission's ER and waited 3-5 hours for the room to be cleaned before I could be transported there.”
- “I was a patient at HCA/Mission Hospital; my care was not acceptable, and I was very disappointed compared to previous visits I had prior to the HCA acquisition. It took forever to get someone to help me once I was placed on the floor prior to waiting hours in the emergency room. Once admitted, my IV ran out

of fluid and for hours the machine was beeping, the nursing staff actually showed me how to cut the machine off because they didn't have enough staff to cover the patient load on the floor. **The IV had dislodged and I had blood all over my bed, gown, and the floor. I pushed the call button time and time again only to have zero response from staff. Once someone finally came to my room, I asked multiple times to please change my sheets and gown only to be told they had no clean linens to give me, I spent two days in a soiled bed and gown.** I am thankful I am able to ambulate because no staff was available to assist me for anything. The two nurses I encountered on my stay were both travel nurses and they told me they had 45 patients to cover alone on a single shift. I feel saddened that we were once one of the top 10 cities in the US to retire based on stellar healthcare and we are now making the national news for a failing healthcare system after a for profit healthcare system.”

- “I had an experience with a relative from out of town that I took to the Mission ER on a Friday night. We got ourselves there and stood in the line to get attention. I had doubts about him being able to stand for the half hour or so in the first line as he was very weak and sleeping constantly. When we got to the front of the line, they said 11 hours and wait out here in the ER waiting room lobby and put him in a rather uncomfortable movable chair. At times during the wait in the ER lobby they gave my relative medical attention. At about 2 pm on Saturday he was taken into the emergency room and that was 18 hours (they had wanted to admit him since the night before.) At about 8 pm on Saturday he was taken to a hospital room. **I think most people would consider someone waiting 18 hours to get into emergency room unacceptable and 24 hours for admittance to a room also unacceptable.** Please look into the time for people arriving at this ER waiting room and when they get into the hospital ER and true attention.”

In Their Own Words: Harm Caused to Vulnerable Oncology Patients

- “It is a huge disservice to the people of western North Carolina that HCA be allowed to continue to run this hospital as it is currently. **I was diagnosed almost three months ago with lung cancer and still have not received any actual treatment due to the length of time it takes to schedule the necessary scans, appointments, biopsies, etc. It is very upsetting to need treatment and not be able to get it in a timely manner.** How many other cancer patients in this area are unnecessarily dying because they cannot get treatment in time? HCA should be made to immediately honor their commitment made to your office and the residents of western North Carolina and hire the staff necessary to properly run their oncology services.”
- “I am a patient, but also, I have a very dear friend on a hospital regimen. She needs to have the treatment in the hospital; she lives [in] Buncombe County, and now to find out that she can't be treated in a hospital [Mission Hospital] close to her family and friends, is very sad. **Please help fix the horrible medical treatment; it's life and death. She needs to have all of us around her, to cheer her on. Please help.**”
- “Mission HCA in Asheville has announced that as of the beginning of March, the Mission Cancer Center will no longer have a retail pharmacy. This shows a blatant disregard for patient care and continuity of services. It is the only one of its kind in western North Carolina, seeing patients from all over the region. Integrative health, cafe, gift shop, and now the pharmacy, have all been taken away from patients, families, staff, and providers enduring or participating in difficult and EXPENSIVE medical treatment. Mission still doesn't see the need to keep these important services that help those of us being treated on one of the five floors. **Our pharmacists here know us all and can easily message upstairs for anything we need. They catch mistakes, advise us, and even courier our medication to us when we are too sick to come back for a delayed medication. I am deeply sorry for all of the wonderful, dedicated staff members this negatively impacts. This is a tremendous loss for so many who are reliant on this vital service in what Mission HCA still refers to as their cancer institute.**”

- “I am a cancer patient. Praise God, chemo worked, and I have had my bi-lateral mastectomy and am completing the Herceptin immunotherapy. It has come to my attention that all of the oncology doctors are leaving Mission because of HCA. I am very frustrated that I am learning that I may have to be referred to another cancer center and doctor in the middle of my immunotherapy treatments. How can HCA now get away with not offering the much-needed service of oncology? Why should cancer patients now have to travel to Charlotte or Raleigh to get treatment? I am one of the blessed patients who is now a survivor, but I have made so many friends this year who are fighting for their life. They are not cancer free yet. **I heard on the news that one of the deals of the sale to HCA is that HCA WOULD provide cancer services and oncology doctors. This is not happening. They are leaving in droves. We need help.**”
- “More's the pity for those undergoing treatment since HCA seems to be phasing out the Cancer Center. My oncologist informed me in March he'd be gone when I returned in June. In June I saw the nurse practitioner (NP) and was satisfied. At my follow up in September, he assessed my situation but needed to consult with the one oncologist who was apparently still working. They proceeded to inform me he was leaving in November so the NP must relocate as NPs cannot practice without a doctor's supervision in NC. **So, I've been forced to find another practice to continue monitoring my needs. A practice that is convenient but only has a part-time oncologist.** Again, fortunately, I am not at the point where I need treatment with chemo or radiation but, if it comes to that, will I be forced to travel outside of Asheville because HCA took away treatment for all leukemias at their facility? This is so unfair.”