

Profits first, patients last

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Health care workers protest outside the University of Michigan Rogel Cancer Center in Ann Arbor, April 15.

Two thousand people a day are [dying from the coronavirus](#) in the United States.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has [begged retired doctors and nurses](#) to return to work.

All hands on deck to fight the pandemic, right? Wrong. In the midst of a public health emergency, hospitals and doctors' offices are firing workers.

"Last week, Bon Secours Mercy Health, which runs 51 hospitals in seven states, announced it would furlough 700 workers. On Wednesday, Ballad Health, which operates 21 hospitals across Tennessee and southwest Virginia, delivered the same bad news to 1,300 employees and said executives would take pay cuts. Employees at Children's National Hospital in the District [Washington, D.C.] were informed this week that they must take off one week, using either vacation time or, if they have none, unpaid leave." ([Washington Post, April 9](#))

These outfits claim they're "starved for cash" because the Covid-19 pandemic forced hospitals to delay "elective" surgeries like hip replacements. These necessary but deferrable procedures are the moneymakers for health factories.

That's capitalist health care for you. Everything is subordinated to the dollar, even during this crisis.

Hospital executives, like Beaumont Health CEO John Fox, are worried that the financially weakest 25 percent of hospitals could tank. "There's no way the other hospitals can absorb their patients," he told the Post.

Fox runs Michigan's biggest hospital chain, which made a \$132 million profit in 2018. He personally raked in over \$5.6 million in 2017, an [82 percent increase](#) from the year before. Yet [starting wages at Beaumont](#) were as low as \$9.45 per hour last year.

As Abayomi Azikiwe reported in Fighting Words, [nurses at Beaumont Hospital](#) are demanding additional personal protective equipment and other necessary measures.

As of April 6, some 1,500 of Beaumont's employees, including 500 nurses, may have the coronavirus.

Fox used every dirty trick to try to defeat a union organizing drive by nurses. The National Labor Relations Board [ruled against Beaumont](#) in February.

After New York and New Jersey, Michigan has the largest number of coronavirus cases. Black people account for [40 percent of the deaths](#), even though they are just 14 percent of the state's population.

The war against the coronavirus is too important to be left to generals like John Fox and the rest of the medical-industrial complex.

It isn't just greed

Brokers selling absolutely necessary medical supplies are ripping off states by charging as much as they can. Why should capitalists pass up the chance to make millions just because people are dying?

"In Illinois, the state is lucky to get N95 masks, which typically cost \$1.75 a piece, for \$4.75 each, said an aide to [Illinois] Gov. J.B. Pritzker (D), who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the bidding process. Prices can sometimes go up to \$10 or \$12 per mask, the aide said.

"Prices for medical gowns have soared to four or five times the usual cost, officials in several states said. A ventilator can now price for close to six figures." ([Washington Post, April 11](#))

As repulsive and criminal as this swindling is, the real culprit is capitalist competition. Under capitalism, life-saving items like masks, gowns and ventilators are commodities to be sold at the highest profit, just like soda pop.

The result is that the states and the federal government [bid against each other](#) and send prices through the roof.

This profiteering isn't a problem for socialist countries like China or Cuba. Health care there is able to be planned, with workers and resources going where they are needed.

Under socialism, people are encouraged to organize and help each other. Members of Cuba's Committees for the Defense of the Revolution check up on neighbors, particularly the elderly. So do over four million members of the Federation of Cuban Women and 300,000 Young Communist League members. The Workers Central Union of Cuba organizes workers to make masks and other personal protective equipment.

Contrast that with the United States, where racist police killed dozens of members of the Black Panther Party who organized free health clinics and programs providing free breakfasts to children.

What does affect Cuba is the U.S. government's economic blockade, which has been intensified by Trump. That hasn't stopped Cuba from sending health care workers to other countries to help people.

The Covid-19 crisis shows that Medicare for All, as proposed by Sen. Bernie Sanders, would be a big step forward.

Even better is to fight for what socialist Cuba has: free health care for all.

