

## **Protesters continue rally at Advocate headquarters**

*LaGrange Doings*  
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**By Jim Collins**  
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About 200 protesters returned to Oak Brook Aug. 8 demanding fairer health care at inner-city hospitals operated by Advocate Health Care.

On July 28, protesters stormed the lobby of the health-care provider's Oak Brook headquarters, calling for chief executive officer Jim Skogsbergh to sign an agreement drafted by Chicago community and church leaders. The document addresses concerns about racial, social and economic justice in Advocate's eight Chicago area hospitals.

To rally support outside of Advocate's front doors Monday, protester Zaida Perez picked up the megaphone and talked about her husband recently being injured in a car accident. He was taken to an Advocate hospital and given two days of care that ended up costing \$12,000.

Perez thinks he was eligible for charity care, the health-care practice of providing treatment regardless of a patient's ability to pay. When the family only paid a portion of the bill, Advocate used a collections agency to try to obtain the rest of the money, Perez said.

"I just want to make sure this doesn't happen to anyone else," she said. "We feel there should be equal health care for the rich and for the poor."

The federally funded health-care provider has great disparities in funding and medical treatment at different hospitals depending on location, said Joseph Geevarghese, a protester and part of the Service Employees International Union's hospital accountability project.

He believes Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove and the facility in Barrington receive more attention and funding than hospitals serving people with lower income levels.

"We are not saying don't invest in the suburban hospitals. We just want to see a more equitable allocation of health-care dollars," Geevarghese said. "There are resources available to serve the hospitals in greater need.

"Advocate is acting more like a for-profit organization than a nonprofit," he added.

Tony Mitchell, a spokesman for Advocate Health Care, disagrees with protesters' claims.

“As far as we are concerned, the principles they set out in the (document) are things we have been doing for years,” he said. “Advocate has long had a strong and significant commitment to providing benefits to all of our communities, regardless of a person’s ability to pay.”

In 2004, Advocate spent about \$250 million in community health-care benefits, including charity care and Medicaid and Medicare costs that are never reimbursed, he said.

Last week, Advocate responded in writing to a letter sent by the protesting groups, Mitchell said.

The two demonstrations do not show a genuine interest in partnering and addressing the issues protesters have brought forth, he added.

After the protesters’ stopped in Oak Brook Monday, the group piled into buses and cars and traveled to the La Grange Country Club, where they believed Advocate officials were attending a golf outing, Geevarghese said.

The protesters left after a 30-minute demonstration, but on their way out of town, Geevarghese said the Cook County’s sheriff’s department pulled them over near the intersection of Ogden Avenue and Wolf Road for the disturbance they created at the country club.

Although no one was charged, police brought the group back to the country club, where the protesters were detained for an hour and then released, he said.

“(The police) found no wrongdoing on our part,” Geevarghese said. “It was a peaceful, nonviolent protest.”

Western Springs police confirmed the Cook County’s sheriff’s department pulled over the protesters.

Geevarghese said the group will continue their visits to Advocate headquarters and also plans on demonstrations at events where Advocate officials will be present.

“We’re going to keep on marching,” he said.