

**TESTIMONY OF
GREATER NEW YORK HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE AND
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
AT A HEARING ON
REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN NEW YORK CITY
OCTOBER 26, 2006**

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Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Alison Burke, Associate Vice President of the Greater New York Hospital Association, which represents more than 250 hospitals and continuing care facilities in the New York metropolitan area, as well as throughout New York State, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. All of GNYHA's members are either not-for-profit, charitable organizations or publicly sponsored institutions. Together, they provide services that range from state-of-the-art, tertiary care to the most basic primary care, given their roles as safety net providers for the communities they serve.

I. The Role of GNYHA Members in Identifying and Treating Child Abuse and Neglect

GNYHA appreciates that the Committee on General Welfare and the Committee on Health are holding today's hearing to focus on the important issue of reporting child abuse and neglect in New York. Identifying, reporting, and treating potential child abuse and neglect are among the most important responsibilities of health care providers, and GNYHA's members take their responsibilities in this regard very seriously. Indeed, many of them have developed extensive knowledge and expertise in the field of child abuse and neglect detection, medical treatment, and therapeutic interventions, with many members having been certified as Child Advocacy Centers. In addition, not only do they undertake extensive efforts to ensure that their staff are qualified to identify and treat the abused or neglected child, but they also provide extensive services aimed at preventing abuse or neglect in at-risk families before it occurs.

This array of services is most often provided through multi-disciplinary teams that have been specially trained to identify and address suspected child abuse and neglect. Staff participating on these teams include individuals who provide expert medical care, psychological counseling, and

after care services, making sure to link families with appropriate supportive care. Many institutions have formal child protection committees that meet to discuss cases and policies, often including representatives of the Administration for Children Services and local District Attorney's offices. In addition, most GNYHA members have designated child abuse coordinators, whose responsibilities include training professionals within the institution regarding indicators of child abuse and related reporting obligations, providing support to professionals in the institution, and coordinating child abuse reports that are made under State law.

Many GNYHA members also provide extensive outreach programs to make community organizations and other groups aware of preventive initiatives and supportive programs. They also provide professional education and training not only for their own staff but for other professionals and community organizations. Finally, they often provide evaluation and assessment services for agencies and other programs to help make recommendations for ongoing care and support.

II. The Important Role of Health Care Providers as Mandated Reporters

In addition to providing extensive services related to identifying and treating child abuse and neglect, the many professionals working in GNYHA members also have the very important designation under New York State law of "mandated reporters." This means that they are required by law to report to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment any instance in which they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child coming before them in their professional or official capacity is an abused or maltreated child. Failure to report such situations can result in civil and criminal liability for those who do not comply. To ensure that reports are filed, GNYHA members have developed child abuse reporting policies and procedures, provide training and information regarding the reporting obligations to their staff, and designate child abuse coordinators to assist with the reporting and response process.

We note that GNYHA has worked closely with City of New York over the years in developing and implementing the City's Prompt Response Protocol, which is the recommended procedure

for hospitals to use to address certain cases of suspected child abuse. The protocol calls for hospitals not only to report suspected child abuse to the Statewide Central Register, but also to contact the New York City Police Department's Special Victims Squad with respect to certain cases. This protocol allows for a more immediate response in very serious cases involving young children.

III. Efforts to Improve Identification, Reporting, and Treatment

Although GNYHA believes that its members take their responsibilities regarding identifying, reporting, and treating child abuse quite seriously, GNYHA is currently working with State and City officials to offer ongoing training to GNYHA members to assist them in their efforts in this regard. Such training is intended to help explain:

- The role and responsibilities of mandated reporters
- How to identify signs of abuse
- How to determine when there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse
- What to expect when you report abuse to the Statewide Central Register
- How to complete the requisite documentation and fulfill reporting requirements.

GNYHA also participates on committees of Mayor Bloomberg's Interagency Task Force on Child Safety and Welfare, whose aim is to improve the capability of all aspects of New York City's infrastructure and support services to identify, report, and care for the abused or neglected child. Through this task force, GNYHA as well as a number of its members provide input on the development of services, systems, and initiatives that will ensure that children in New York City receive the protection and services they deserve.

IV. Summary

In summary, GNYHA, its members, and their many individual practitioners appreciate and respect the important roles that they play in the lives of all New Yorkers, but more particularly for today's hearing the roles that they play in protecting and caring for some of the most vulnerable members of our communities, namely, abused and neglected children. We therefore

applaud you for holding today's hearing and offer to work with you and the City of New York toward improving upon the many programs and services that are already in place to address this very important issue.