



Alan D. Aviles
President

May 18, 2006

To All HHC Employees,

There has been much debate about changes in federal immigration laws. While no laws have changed, there are reports that growing fear among immigrant New Yorkers is leading some to cancel doctor appointments or not seek care in clinics, hospitals or emergency rooms.

HHC and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs will embark on a public awareness campaign this month in an effort to dispel these fears and reassure immigrant New Yorkers that public hospitals are safe and that we will honor their right to privacy. This means that public hospital employees do not share information about immigration status with immigration authorities or law enforcement agencies.

As you know, most children and pregnant women, regardless of immigration status, are eligible for health insurance. However, HHC staff helps all uninsured patients to apply for the insurance programs for which they are eligible. If patients cannot get insurance and have limited resources to pay for health care, HHC staff can still help. Through our HHC Options program, we can work with our patients so that their costs for health care are affordable. To do this, the appropriate and authorized HHC employees must ask patients for proof of income, home address and some proof of identity and date of birth. But we keep this information absolutely confidential.

That's why it's important that we let our patients know that the HHC policy is clear. Any patient information obtained by an HHC employee may not be disclosed to any third party. Any HHC employee who violates this policy may lose his or her job.

Over the next few weeks, staff will be invited to participate in small group sessions or larger town hall meetings to discuss in more detail HHC policies and procedures related to cultural sensitivity, customer service standards of care and procedures regarding patient records and confidentiality. Some of these sessions may include representatives from immigration advocacy groups who can also answer questions about the current and the pending immigration laws. I hope you will participate in these discussions.

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I am very proud of HHC's long history of caring for everyone regardless of ability to pay or immigration status. I am also proud of all of you who live up to this commitment every day. You are the face of HHC, the front lines to the quality health services we offer to everyone in our city. You are the caring individuals who heal patients and can make them feel welcome and protected. And every one of you can help deliver this reassuring message to immigrant New Yorkers seeking our help.

I am certain you agree that treating all patient information as confidential is critical to the trust we want to build with our patients. This trust helps us to provide quality health services to the children and adults who need our care.

I hope you will join me in renewing HHC's promise to immigrant New Yorkers. Our mission has never been so important. Our commitment has never been stronger.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan D. Aviles', with a stylized, cursive flourish extending to the right.

Alan D. Aviles