

Department of Health

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Dear Dr. Fera and President Robinson,

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) received an open letter from concerned members of the South County community on September 4, 2024, listing and detailing concerns about the impact of the relationship between executive leadership and providers on patient care at South County Hospital, including the resignation of physicians in hematology/oncology, radiation oncology, cardiology, and primary care. (I acknowledged receipt of the letter—via email—on September 9, 2024.)

Following the media coverage of recent events at South County Hospital and the statements that both parties have made, I felt it was important to reach out to both of you regarding RIDOH’s role in regulating licensed facilities.

RIDOH acts as the State Survey Agency for the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). When RIDOH receives a complaint against a hospital, the scope of a survey (investigation) is determined by CMS.

Based on the concerns raised in the letter and due to the fact that RIDOH had not received patient complaints about services being delayed, CMS determined that the scope of the survey was limited to evaluating the CMS condition of participation related to the governing body. (See attached excerpt of *Title 42 – Public Health* document.)

The survey team interviewed multiple patients and providers in the areas specified in the complaint and found no concerns with the quality of patient care. The survey team also determined that the Board of Trustees is aware of the concerns raised in the letter and is working to address the concerns. The survey team found no conditional deficiencies of participation in Medicare and Medicaid Services or with State licensure. Per CMS policy, a survey report is generated only when there are deficiencies identified.

The Department’s statutory and regulatory role is to protect and maintain the standards of patient care and public safety as dictated by State and federal requirements. RIDOH investigates complaints about issues over which we have jurisdiction. Apart from investigations of complaints, CMS also directs, on an annual basis, which hospitals will receive a full survey from RIDOH. CMS has not required RIDOH to do a full survey for any hospital since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As such, I want to correct one fact that was included in this past weekend’s media coverage. **This survey was limited to the scope of the investigation of the complaint, as determined by CMS. This survey was not a full survey of the entire hospital.** It is important that the media and members of the public understand this distinction.

It is RIDOH’s hope and expectation that any concerns not deemed within RIDOH’s scope to regulate (issues of patient safety and quality of care) need to be addressed and resolved between hospital administration and the medical/clinical staff. In the best interest of the health and well-being of the patients and community you serve, I urge hospital administration and the concerned clinicians and community members to continue working toward mutually agreeable resolutions and to keep RIDOH updated on progress.

Sincerely,



Jerome Larkin, MD

Director of Health