

LAKEFRONT OUTLOOK

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Locals push for U. of C. trauma unit

by Sam Cholke

Protestors returned to the University of Chicago Medical Center on April 21, this time banging on windows to demand a trauma center.

South Side groups led by Woodlawn's Fearless Leadership by the Youth (FLY) have marched to the hospital four times since last October in an effort to get care for gunshot and car accident victims. There is no facility that can treat such injuries on the South Side.

The mostly Woodlawn protestors have now been joined by other community groups representing areas north of the hospital, including the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization and Grand Boulevard's chapter of CeaseFire.

"It's been nine months coming back to the same building and no results," said Shelia Rush, whose son started FLY and whose death sparked the call for more care.

Her son, Damian Turner, was shot in the back last August in Woodlawn blocks from the university's hospital and died at Northwestern Memorial Hospital's trauma center downtown. "He was two blocks from a hospital and he should have been taken there and at least stabilized," she said.

The most recent protest was touched off

after University of Chicago Medical Center President Sharon O'Keefe cancelled a March 23 meeting with the group. In response, a crowd of about 150 stopped traffic on South University Avenue for an hour chanting and waving signs that read "U of C has racist policies" and "Police don't do sh**, someone has to."

Chicago police officers blocked traffic in front of the university's administration office and largely kept their distance while the group tried to get the attention of O'Keefe, who they thought was in a meeting at the Surgery-Brain Research Pavilion across the street.

"You can laugh now, officers," Rush yelled at the police. "Cry later, we will see you later, the University of Chicago won't help you either."

The group was largely frustrated by the end of the day, having failed to secure a meeting with hospital administration.

"We're going to have to step it up," Rush said.

John Easton, a spokesman for the hospital, said the group does have a meeting scheduled with the community relations department in coming weeks. The medical center issued a statement that day saying the trauma care issue is larger than the

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university and to hastily build one would endanger other beneficial services at the hospital.

"The medical center is committed to improving health and access to quality care for the South Side of Chicago through a coordinated network of patient care, community-based research and medical education, but no medical center can solve by itself the problems of an area that has lost seven hospitals and thousands of hospital beds," the statement says.

The university briefly operated a trauma center that was closed in 1988 because its high cost of operation.



Sheila Rush, mother of Damian Turner who was murdered last August in the 6100 block of Cottage Grove Avenue, speaks to a group of more than one hundred community members and activists as they protest the closing of the trauma center at the University of Chicago Hospitals.

Marc Monaghan