



NEWS RELEASE

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An Open Letter to the Greater Atlanta Community ***Response to the Announcement by Wellstar Health System to Close*** ***Atlanta Medical Center & Atlanta Medical Center South***

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of convenience and comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)

(Atlanta, GA) -- We, the **Atlanta Medical Association, Inc. (ATLMed)**, ask the Greater Atlanta Community to stand with us as we strategize solutions to help decrease the impact of the planned closure of **Atlanta Medical Center (AMC)**, which includes the combined campuses of Atlanta Medical Center South (recently renamed Wellstar East Point Health Center), by **Wellstar Health System (Wellstar)**. This closure will affect affiliated doctors' offices, outpatient clinics, imaging and emergency services opened and built to serve our communities for the last 121 years. The public announcement made on August 31, 2022 by Wellstar leadership has created, in our opinion, a second healthcare crisis and directly erodes the public safety of all that inhabit and visit Metropolitan Atlanta.

The closure of AMC is of great concern to our membership and community due to the significant effects of losing needed bed capacity, the loss of agency for our colleagues to practice medicine and the many unintended consequences that are likely to arise with the loss of a healthcare access points, and a Level 1 Trauma Center serving Georgia's most densely populated metropolitan area in the Southeast Region. AMC is also the second largest licensed bed hospital in Georgia with teaching programs, and an Advanced Primary Stroke Center – none of which are easy to replace.

Referencing the 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) published by Wellstar earlier this year, it is undebatable, that the Wellstar leadership understands and is acutely aware of the direct and indirect effects of closing these critical two hospitals within the shared service area. As clearly stated, in the CHNA, **"the primary focus of data collection for this assessment was on under-resourced, high-need, and medically underserved population living in the primary service area of the hospital."** Furthermore, the report also recognizes **"the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on all health needs – disproportionately affecting historically disadvantaged groups."** In addition, there were 14 areas identified (1) Obesity, (2) Access to appropriate care, (3) Behavioral healthcare, (4) Educational awareness, (5) Equitable revitalization, Employment, and job training, (6) Maternal and child health, (7) Healthy living, (8) Housing, (9) Poverty, (10) Education, (11) Cancer, (12) Culturally competent services, (13) Sexually transmitted diseases and (14) Violence and crime. It is also notable that secondary data presented within this report demonstrated that the social determinants of health "were improving in many areas served by AMC before the global pandemic."

Page 2

Over the last two years, ATLMed members and many others answered the call-to-action, continuing to serve on the front lines while taking reductions in pay and without appropriate personal protective equipment -- as we learned to navigate an unprecedented and devastating global pandemic. Despite the profound loss of life, personal and societal consequences from which we are all still reeling, **we did not retreat**. Instead, we partnered and collaborated with our patients and the community to adapt our practices to allow us to leverage innovative solutions to care for our patients.

We are demanding that Wellstar do the same. We demand, on behalf of our current and future patients, that Wellstar allow another capable entity the opportunity to purchase and operate these facilities to serve our community and their healthcare needs. Creating barriers to this end signals to all that Wellstar has decided to leave the most vulnerable in our community uncared for and without a clear plan to transition care. We remind the Atlanta community that Wellstar has significantly reduced our AMC physicians' capacity to serve the patients that they have proudly served for decades.

As the world, and certainly the Metropolitan Atlanta, is continuing to feel impact of the novel COVID-19 virus, this abrupt and poorly planned announcement has foreshadowed a worsening public healthcare crisis. The closure of AMC's facilities will lead to a widening gap in healthcare disparities, increased loss of life, economic loss and emotional stress that are disproportionately affecting communities of color and patients living at levels of lower socioeconomic status. In addition, all of our neighbors, and visitors to Atlanta, are at significant risks for loss of life and/or significant disability due to the inevitable and unpredictable traumatic events that require the lifesaving Level 1 trauma care that we all come to depend on in collaboration with our other community and academic hospitals.

While we do not have all the answers, the Atlanta Medical Association, Inc. (ATLMed) and community partners are committed to making sure that we are at the table to collaborate to create an innovative solution for all. As much as any group with vested interest in the health outcomes of our citizens, we recognize what's at stake. With this letter, we extend our resources and expertise to collaborate with the Governor of Georgia, and other elected leaders, corporate partners, community organizations and the State of Georgia to figure out what's next for the greater community we live, practice and serve.

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About the AtMed. *The Atlanta Medical Association, Inc. was founded in 1890. The organization was formed in part to establish an organization of physicians of Atlanta and its environs to secure intelligent unity and harmony in every phase of medical professional life - in all scientific, legislative and public health matters to encourage the protection of health in our communities. For more information, visit www.atlmed.org.*

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