

Kirsten Ek, MD  
UCH Hospitalist

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Dear Legislator:

I am writing to you as a resident of the town of Avon, and a hospitalist physician and faculty member of the School of Medicine. Along the way not only have I received all of my own health care at UCONN Health as a patient myself, but I also gave birth to 3 of my 4 children at the UCONN Labor and Delivery center, and all 4 of my children went to the day care center on the UCONN Health campus.

Beyond trusting my own care and that of my children to UCONN, I am proud to say that I entrusted my medical school training here at UCONN School of Medicine. As a female entering the field of medicine, my time of medical studies coincided with my reproductive years. I knew that I wanted to build both a family and a career in medicine.

Before embarking on what I feared might be a herculean challenge in terms of family building and the study of medicine, I had carefully researched my medical school options. As it turned out, UCONN School of Medicine felt to be the best fit in terms of meeting all my personal goals, and I enrolled and came to Connecticut from New York. It was the best choice of my life. While many women struggle to balance careers in science and motherhood, I found more support here than I possibly could have imagined. My medical school deans offered me flexibility and more than my fair share of encouragement. I do not think any other medical school could have compared. My husband pursued his law career in town, and my children joined the local public schools. We settled down here in Avon, and we pay taxes here.

After medical school, I couldn't imagine going anywhere else for my residency training, and so I enrolled Internal Medicine residency training here at UCONN. Again, I met tremendous support every step of the way – the most flexible family and female physician-friendly atmosphere here at

this institution under Drs. Kiki Nissen, Dr. Steven Angus, and Dr. Rebecca Andrews, to name a few. So happy was I that after completion of my residency, I stayed in CT to practice medicine here at the Health Center.

When I speak to you with my plea to preserve this hospital as a public one, I do so from the perspective of someone who is deeply grateful to this institution as it currently stands for having given me the opportunity to develop into a physician, while at the same time bringing up my children. I have literally entrusted my education, the birth and care of my children, and my own health to this public institution. My loyalty comes from a deep gratitude to a system that helped me every step of the way to achieve my goals, and lets me pursue my current passion of environmental sustainability in health care.

Now in my capacity as hospitalist at the Health Center, I have a chance to give back to the people of the state of Connecticut who seek care here, something I am tremendously proud and humbled to be able to do.

I am also proud to have had a hand in developing a new curricular offering for first and second year, called Patient Advocacy in Communities, Teams & Health Systems, or “PACTS”. As part of that, I have made it a point that each student develops advocacy pacts with the community itself –students have gone around the state meeting with many care partners, including factories, with visiting nurses, advocacy organizations, and centers of expertise on disabilities – all complementing the primary care they give at practices around the state.

Just 2 weeks ago, all 110 first year medical students visited the three neighborhoods of the North Hartford Promise Zone, generously hosted by Courtenay Jackson, of the Office of the Mayor of Hartford, in conjunction with the Health Disparities Institute. The students expressed how eager they are to support Health Equity advocacy for the citizens of these neighborhoods, taking in perspectives of leaders from the Urban League, Hartford Health and Human Services, Community Solutions, Neighborhood Revitalization Zones, HUD, Intercommunity Health, and other faith and local leaders. The idea behind this module was that all the medical students who come here to learn and practice medicine get to know and more deeply understand some of the communities they will be serving in their clinical years.

I would like to share with you a representative comment from two students who just visited North Hartford:

“Leaving the NHPZ I felt like I had seen a community I had lived next to my whole life for the first time. I felt like it is my obligation, as an aspiring physician, to know the inextricable ties between where you live and your health outcome, and to speak out with people. “

“Overall the session was very powerful. Getting to hear the work that the panelists do and their dedication to improving the community was heartwarming. I did see the great role that physicians have in this community to guide standardized care and patient centered care.

Doctors have a dual role, they need to be leaders in the community by fighting disparities in care, and serving the community by targeting social determinants of health. They also need to be listeners, learning about the community they serve, hearing the concerns, and finding creative ways to help keep the community safe and healthy. I think that after today’s session, I have a better sense of the struggles Hartford faces and how I as a medical student can be more conscious while seeing patients of the array of possible health disparities an individual may be facing.”

I am proud to be a patient, a physician, and an educator here at our state’s public hospital and medical school. As a public institution, we can best continue to serve our nearby communities, to act as their advocates in care, and to help the next generation of physicians continue to do so in an equitable and sustainable way. Because of UCONN Health, I was attracted to Connecticut, along with my husband and 4 daughters. And we all stayed here to live. Please, in your deliberations, I humbly ask that you take into account my perspective – one grateful and very lucky doctor standing before you today, asking you to fund UConn Health and keep it as our state’s flagship public hospital.

Sincerely,  
Kirsten Ek, MD  
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