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## Grady should allow a checkup

By **RON MARSHALL**  
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There has been a lot of alarming news about Grady Memorial Hospital. People don't understand that Grady is not just the safety net for the poor and uninsured. It is the safety net for everyone. That's why everyone needs to be involved.

There are 46 million uninsured people in America. These people just didn't forget to get insurance. A lot can't get insurance at any price. Some uninsured people are working poor, and some are actually wealthy but still can't get insurance. No matter how well off you are, if you get very sick, and you can't work, you will eventually lose your insurance, and you will end up at a public hospital, like Grady. That is a fact. This is not just the safety net for the poor. Grady is everyone's safety net.



BEN GRAY/Staff

[\(ENLARGE\)](#)

Grady Memorial Hospital is in a financial crisis, but leaders are unwilling to allow public scrutiny. Scandals have damaged the hospital's reputation.

We need to support Grady, we need to bail Grady out. But we first need to improve the governance. We all know that money is spent at Grady on things that aren't right. Every dime at a public hospital has to be spent on the people who need it. One of the reasons some Georgians don't support Grady is the scandals of the past years. We've got to take the time to make sure these scandals are addressed and corrected, so that Grady can move on to a new and better phase, for patients, for taxpayers, for everyone.

For the last years, I've maintained a hotline to hear from whistle-blowers at Grady. The picture has not been pretty. The best officers, doctors and students have been trying to do something about the problems, and to alert the public. They haven't been treated well.

Grady, even in this emergency, is hiding from public scrutiny. At a recent board meeting, they actually shut out the public. This is no way to treat the people you need to bail the place out. If you want to have the public bail the hospital out, the people must be let in. There must be open government. They must open their books, their files, and stop the stonewalling. Accountability and the safety net go together.

We also need to avoid giving people an excuse not to support Grady. We can't make this an "us" versus "them" issue. We have met the patients, and they are us! Well, I've met the solution, and they are us!

This is a public institution, supported by the public, and we've got to make people understand they have a stake in Grady. Even if you never step into Grady, you need to know that safety net is there. If you, your mother, your sister or your brother got so sick they lost their insurance, they need to know that safety net is there. If you are burned so badly other hospitals can't help, you need to know that safety net is there. If a crazy man climbs up in a tower in Buckhead and starts shooting, you need to know that Grady is there. If you are riding on a bus, and it tips over, you need to know that Grady is there.

Even if you are in New Orleans or New York City and there is a catastrophe, you need to know that there is a Grady in Atlanta that can treat casualties if needed. Public hospitals are part of our national security structure. Grady is a microcosm for our nation's health system. What we do here is going to affect others.

The taxpayer doesn't mind paying if he knows the money is going to someone who really needs it, some child, some victim, somebody who wants to recover and just needs a hand up. The taxpayer needs to know its not going into some politician's pocket. We have to have X-ray vision to stop any possibility that patronage will ever happen again. We've got to restore trust by opening the books, so that people will then go and open their pockets.

We know Grady is near bankruptcy. But for Grady to get more, it has to do more. All Grady patients need to know they are going to get the same basic care people get around the rest of the city. The doctors and nurses have to be of the same quality. The doctors and nurses have to be able to speak up on behalf of the patients. Recently, a doctor at Grady was found to be a pedophile, and was not sanctioned by Grady, or screened by Grady for his behavior. Surely, the community can expect more.

Since 2004, I have served as the chairman of a citizen coalition that stands up for standards at Grady. We have been trying to prevent the very problems that have occurred by attempting to force the hospital to be more open. We have filed dozens of Open Records requests, none of which has been honored. We have offered to meet with Grady officials, and we have been rebuffed. We offered to speak at trustee meetings. We were stonewalled.

Finally, we filed ethics complaints to force the county commissioners to abide by their own rules. We are sad to say, no one would listen.

Grady needs an infusion of funds, but first Grady must ensure the funds will be used to protect patient care. We need good management at Grady, and a commitment to abide by laws and standards.

• **Ron Marshall** is leader of the New Grady Coalition.



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