

**CEO ESMAEIL PORSA'S COMMENTS
ON BEN TAUB EXPANSION AND
LAND ACQUISITION – 9-23-2025**



I don't have to tell anyone here about the health care crisis that our community is facing today that is expected to get only worse in the coming months. Harris County has the largest uninsured population in Texas, and one of the largest in the country. Those numbers are likely to get worse as more residents lose their Medicaid eligibility, lose access to health insurance, and as our economy worsens.

We should all be fully aware of the \$1 billion cut to Medicaid that resulted by the passing of the OBBB act earlier this year.

Absent federal action before October 1 of this year, an action that is not expected to occur, Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) cuts will result in an additional \$800 million reduction to the State of Texas health care funding according to the Teaching Hospitals of Texas calculations.

To make matters even more dire, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace Advanced Premium Tax Credits (APTCs) are also set to expire on October 1, 2025. Because of this, hundreds of thousands of Texans including many Houstonians will lose their health insurance coverage.

As a result of all of the funding cuts, loss of eligibility, and health insurance affordability, Harris Health anticipates that thousands of additional Houston residents will lose access to health insurance and will have to rely on Harris Health services for even their basic health care needs.

In short, we anticipate a tsunami of hundreds of thousands of additional uninsured and underinsured Texans and Harris County residents in the coming months further stressing our already overstretched capacity and further exacerbating the urgent public health necessity that we currently face.

Harris Health services, and Ben Taub Hospital in particular, are needed now more than ever. We all remember that during the COVID pandemic the value of Ben Taub Hospital became crystal clear. As the only public safety net hospital in the TMC, and one of only two adult level I trauma centers, BT took care of a disproportionate number of COVID patients. By doing so, BT helped to prevent many of the horrors that were experienced by communities across our country and the world when their medical systems collapsed under the stress of COVID.

Since Ben Taub opened its doors in 1990, the population of Harris County has almost doubled while the capacity of Ben Taub has decreased.

Today, Ben Taub is consistently operating at or above 100% capacity when it is forced to place patient beds in hospital hallways and corridors. The result of the lack of adequate hospital capacity to address the ever increasing demand is prolonged wait times for people receiving medical attention in Ben Taub's emergency room, and even longer wait times for the patients who are sick enough to be admitted to the hospital but have no beds available to be assigned to in order to receive care, putting at risk our commitment to this community to be there when Houstonians' lives literally hang in the balance and to provide timely world class emergency and trauma care that makes the difference between life and death.

Consequently, expansion of Ben Taub Hospital capacity was identified as a top priority in Harris Health's 2020 strategic plan, and the reason why Ben Taub expansion was part of Harris Health's 2023 \$2.5 billion bond proposal that

received overwhelming support by Harris County residents. As part of this proposal, Harris Health allocated nearly \$400 million toward the expansion of Ben Taub by adding approximately 100 new patient rooms to Ben Taub Hospital. This is a desperately needed additional capacity to Ben Taub to allow it to deliver the timely lifesaving care that Houston has come to expect and depend on.

The urgently needed additional capacity for Ben Taub has to occur at or adjacent to Ben Taub to allow for maximum operational efficiency and fiscal stewardship.

Ben Taub has to have ready access to the expanded capacity to address its overcrowding challenges while patients at the future Ben Taub expansion must have access to everything Ben Taub has to offer including the emergency room, operating rooms, radiology, pathology, specialty services, parking, central utility, security, etc. It is therefore operationally impractical and fiscally irresponsible to create the urgently needed additional capacity for BT anywhere that is geographically distant from the existing BT.

There is no space in the current footprint of Ben Taub to allow for the creation of the additional capacity. Building on top of Ben Taub is also fiscally prohibitive and operationally impractical. The current Ben Taub hospital suffers from significant infrastructure issues related to deferred maintenance that has been caused by many years of underfunding this county's only public safety net health system. Moreover, disrupting Ben Taub's current patient care operations while trying to create additional patient beds above the current Ben Taub hospital would lead to significant harm to Ben Taub's ability to deliver services at the current levels. We simply have no other choice but one.

The only adjacent space conducive to achieving the goal of expanding Ben Taub in a financially responsible and operationally efficient manner, to address the urgent public health necessity that Houston is currently facing, is the parcels of

land immediately adjacent and in front Ben Taub's emergency department. These parcels belong to the City of Houston and are part of Hermann Park, separated from the main Park by Cambridge street. At 8.9 acres, these parcels are less than 2% of the entirety of Hermann Park.

I would like to remind everyone again that while the need for Harris Health services at all of our locations including BT hospital currently far outweighs our capacity, the need for our services is only expected to grow at a rapid pace in the coming months.

The time to sure up the future of Ben Taub hospital is now.

The board action today is a preliminary step in a longer multi-step legal process to acquire these pieces of land. This process will include notification of all property interest holders, including all holders of a reversionary interest in these parcels, according to statutory requirements. As required by Texas law, all interest holders will be paid the fair market value of their interests, as determined during the eminent domain process. **Following the Board's action today, Harris Health will continue to work with relevant stakeholders prior to requesting Commissioner's Court action in order to ensure that the interests of the community are fully vetted as part of this process.**

I just want to close by reiterating the immense public necessity for this project. To ensure a viable future for Ben Taub Hospital as an irreplaceable foundation to the entire healthcare ecosystem of Houston and Harris County.

A future in which Ben Taub can continue to deliver on its promise of being there when its lifesaving services matter most and when life and death hang in the balance.

A future in which BT can continue to be a beacon of hope to hundreds of thousands of patients who rely on Ben Taub as their only access to high quality care.

And a future in which Ben Taub can continue to be a center of excellence for health care research and innovation and the major training ground for Baylor College of Medicine medical students and residents, and thousands of nurses and other allied health professionals.