



August 15, 2018

Rick Davis
EVP, News Standards and Practices

Dear Rick:

Mayo Clinic strongly disagrees with the inaccurate, incomplete and irresponsible reporting by CNN in the three-part series “Escape from Mayo Clinic” published on Monday. The series, reported by Elizabeth Cohen and John Bonifield, lacks the context that CNN knew, but chose not to report.

At the heart of this story is a complex situation involving a vulnerable adult in a suspected abusive family environment.

As an organization, we value the role of the news media and do not expect unanimously favorable coverage of Mayo Clinic; our goal is to earn it. But, what we do expect is accurate and fair reporting. For 18 months, we shared information to help the CNN reporters investigate the facts of the situation. They clearly understood our concern for the patient’s safety, they chose to ignore those concerns and did not check or report on public records associated with this case right up to the point the story aired/was published.

Equally disturbing:

- The reporters’ firm commitment to a pre-determined narrative despite contrary facts.
- Insisting that Mayo Clinic be prepared to defend itself instead of pursuing an accurate, fact-based story.
- Contacting direct patient care staff with veiled threats and asking them to breach confidentiality in order to corroborate information. This would be a potential legal breach of the patient’s confidentiality for them to do so.
- Contact with the patient’s family prior to their removal of the patient from the hospital, demonstrating an early and unwavering faith in the patient’s mother’s viewpoint and prioritizing pursuit of a story over the well-being of a vulnerable adult.
- Despite attempts to share our concerns with the News Standards and Practices unit, and promises of fair and balanced reporting, the story that was published was factually incomplete and wholly inaccurate.

Elizabeth and John chose to disregard and not investigate key facts that were shared with them:

- The role of the biological father in making care decisions for his daughter during her hospital stay when the mother was unavailable.

- Allegations of the mother’s abuse of the patient.
- Mayo reported suspected abuse of the patient, a vulnerable adult, to the County as part of our statutory reporting requirement; and reported again when the patient was removed from the hospital without a safe discharge plan.
- Mayo never sought to be appointed as a guardian or make decisions for the patient; instead, Mayo notified the County of the patient’s vulnerable adult status and asked for assistance in identifying a decision-maker.
- Mayo never denied a request from the family to transfer the patient to a different facility.
- Mayo did not arbitrarily remove the mother from the hospital; instead she was removed after she exhibited escalating disruptive and aggressive behavior that interfered with the care of her daughter and resulted in multiple staff members reporting fear for their safety. A team of Mayo staff members also met with the mother and stepfather to explain why she was removed and they expressed understanding.
- Our care team provided appropriate pain management according to the pain needs of the patient and was concerned when the mother requested opioids for her daughter so that the mother could get some sleep.

Trust in journalism is unfortunately at a pivotal point in American history. Your viewers and readers deserve strong, accurate reporting that demonstrates the highest level of journalistic integrity. In this situation, your team did not meet this standard. We hope you can raise it for future stories – your reporters, your organization and the public deserve it.

Sincerely,

Chris Gade
Chair, Mayo Clinic Department of Public Affairs

cc: Elizabeth Cohen, Senior Medical Correspondent
Kevin Flowers, Head of CNN Medical Unit
Marianna Spicer-Joslyn, Deputy Director, News Standards and Practices
John Bonifield, Supervising Producer, CNN Health
Samuel A. Di Piazza, Jr., Chair, Mayo Clinic Board of Trustees