

More Than Just a Hospital: Community Hospital and Health Inequality in Evanston, Illinois

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Abstract

Evanston, Illinois was one of the first US towns to give reparations money to Black individuals and families affected by housing discrimination. An equally restrictive but often overlooked form of discrimination existed alongside housing segregation in the hospitals and doctors' offices throughout the Chicago suburb. To combat this, Community Hospital of Evanston (CHE) was founded in 1914 to serve Black Evanstonians who were barred access to white hospitals. CHE grew to become an institution in Evanston's predominantly Black 5th ward, faithfully serving patients until it closed in 1980. This research explores Community Hospital's role in Evanston's history of racial segregation through interviews with former CHE patients and archival research. These sources consistently revealed accounts of doctors and nurses, often Black Evanstonians themselves, exhibiting a commitment to compassionate and personalized healthcare for their patients. The trajectory of CHE mirrors that of other Black medical institutions whose occupancy and general support diminished greatly following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which allowed Black doctors and nurses to practice at larger and more well-equipped white facilities. The inability to compete with larger hospitals coincided with an era of medical improvements that the 54-bed Community Hospital could not keep up with. Despite the quality, personalized care that patients remember at CHE, it was one of many 5th ward businesses that did not receive the necessary support to survive in a post-segregation era. The final product of this research is a public-facing digital timeline that contextualizes CHE's 66-year lifespan through national hospital trends. The timeline focuses on the people whose dedication to Community Hospital allowed it to become the well-respected and welcoming hub of healthcare that Black Evanstonians remember it as. The timeline was digitally published by Shorefront Legacy Center, an Evanston-based Black archival institution that has circulated similar profiles of historical Black figures and entities.

About the author:

George Krupkin is an independent researcher from Evanston, Illinois. He graduated from Elon University in 2024 with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy and was honored as a 2024 Elon University Provost Scholar, an award given to 12 exceptional undergraduate researchers annually.

Over the past three years, George's research has focused on public health inequality related to a former hospital in Evanston. This work has deepened his understanding of the town's complex racial history and influenced him to continue engaging with diverse stories and perspectives.

Currently, George is interning at Shorefront Legacy Center, a nonprofit archival space in Evanston focused on Black history in Chicago's North Shore communities. Shorefront provided George with most of his primary resources and interview connections for his research. He is grateful for the opportunity to work with an organization that has supported him throughout his research journey and is a positive presence in the Evanston community. George is interested in

pursuing a career as an archivist or in the nonprofit sector because he enjoys interacting with history and exploring its continued influence on today's society.