Role Play - Dialysis and Limits to Charity Care

Since dialysis is a Medicare benefit, non-citizens and undocumented immigrants are not eligible for coverage of outpatient dialysis. In your state, they are also not eligible for Medicaid coverage. To allow access to care for some patients, your hospital has had a contract with a local outpatient dialysis center for several years. This allows 22 patients to receive dialysis three times a week.

The dialysis center was recently bought out by a large for-profit company which is reviewing all contracts. Despite attempts to negotiate, the new owners reject anything short of full payment. The hospital had been paying $15,500 per patient per year, but the new owners insist on the standard amount of $75,000 which covers all their costs. Unfortunately, the hospital is already $5 million over budget for the year and could not afford such an increase.

Soon after, patients begin showing up at local EDs in need of dialysis. In some instances, patients were turned away as they were not sick enough to warrant emergency treatment. The story has been a focus of a local news station, which has depicted the hospital in a bad light.

Some nurses suggested working with the embassy of each patient's country of origin to send them home to seek care there. Others think that emergent dialysis for those who present to the ED is acceptable. The mission leader requests a discernment facilitator to help leaders involved develop a response to the problem with the COO, a nephrologist, and the Director of Case Management.