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CONTRIBUTOR

# The Alienation Of America's Best Doctors

Doctors are hurting and they don't have the time to reach out.

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Melinda Hakim f t

Melinda Hakim MD—CEO of DoctorCPR.com—a medical career site that reaches over 500,000 medical professionals looking for jobs and resources.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Physician Careers are Rapidly Losing Their Appeal

I grew up in the '80s in awe of my dad who was a talented general surgeon.

## H The Alienation Of America's Best Doctors

had for his work. Our home was inundated with dozens of homemade baked goods, knitted scarves, gift baskets, and colorful "thank you" cards carefully prepared by his patients. He never complained about his job. Even if he had to leave a family event or wake up in the middle of the night to do a trauma case — he was never resentful. He felt invigorated by saving thousands of lives. He was grateful to be well compensated for his sacrifices. He worked extremely



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hard (sometimes putting in over one hundred twenty hours a week), but he was able to do his work the way he felt was best since he ran his own private practice. He was beloved, respected, and couldn't imagine pursuing any other profession that offered greater rewards.

Unfortunately times have radically changed. The best and the brightest simply don't want to become doctors anymore. Physicians are burning out. They are leaving the profession. [They are going bankrupt.](#) They are selling their private practices to big hospitals. They are retiring early. [We are facing a growing doctor shortage.](#) Doctors no longer want to be a part of a health care system that doesn't value them after decades of sacrifice, debt, and brutal training. [Physicians now have the highest suicide rate of all professions.](#)

**“Doctors no longer want to be a part of a health care system that doesn't value them after decades of sacrifice, debt, and brutal training.”**

As an undergraduate at Harvard University, I was fortunate to be surrounded by some of the country's most talented students. Back then (in the '90s), many of the students were on the fence as to whether to apply to medical school or join the dozens of consulting and financial companies that aggressively recruited us. After speaking to the new generation of Harvard seniors at networking events — I realize that [they are no longer on the fence.](#) Our country's brightest graduates are simply not choosing to become physicians anymore.

Of course, we cannot deny that we need to focus on curtailing health care costs. But we absolutely cannot cut health care at the expense of alienating physicians. Our talent pool is rapidly shrinking. Nearly every month now, another one of my most brilliant physician colleagues (from Stanford, Yale, Johns Hopkins, UCLA, and Harvard) leaves his medical practice. This is real. This is palpable. [These talented physicians are quitting to join startup ventures,](#) “concierge” practices for the ultra-wealthy, pharmaceutical companies, or the ranks of corporate America where they feel they are better compensated and respected for their brain power and sacrifice.

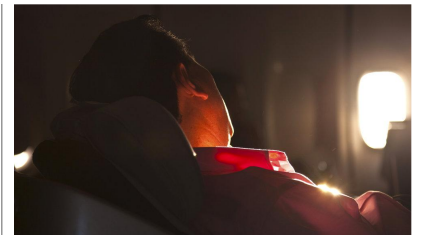
Let's look at some of the facts to help explain why becoming a physician in America is rapidly losing its appeal.

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- 4. [The average debt](#) doctors face after medical school is \$183,000
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- 6. [State governments](#) are passing laws to limit the compensation of “out of network” physicians

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Doctors are hurting, and they don't have the time to reach out. They don't have the time to lobby Congress. They are far too busy trying to help their patients and keep their practices afloat.

Our country needs to figure out solutions to help preserve and encourage physician autonomy— not continually restrict it. With rapidly increasing government reporting regulations, new plans to move away from fee-for-service payments, growing patient complaints about high deductibles, Medicare audits, more complex documentation mandates, increasingly complicated coding requirements, payment denials, time-consuming prior authorizations, expensive [Electronic Health Records mandates](#)....why would our country's top talent go through years of debt and brutal training to face over-regulation and exhaustion?

We also need to continue to compensate physicians at a fair level that matches their skills, high level of education, and sacrifice — not figure out ways to “bundle away” what they make. Should health care dollars be shifted away from those who are waking up in the middle of the night to save lives, who are spending countless hours researching cases after work, who are neglecting their families to study for re-credentialing boards, who are saddled with inexorable debt, or who are spending thousands of dollars to attend meetings all over the world to find out the best way to care for patients? [Contrary to popular belief, physician reimbursements comprise only a small proportion of our country's total health care expenditures.](#)

**“ Short-changing the individuals who are sacrificing everything to save lives will lead to the biggest threat to our nation’s health care system.**

Whether we like it or not, we will all be patients at some point in our lives.

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face a pay cut should he spend 20 minutes with you? Won't we get frustrated when we cannot get an appointment with a quality internist for two months because so many great doctors have left their practices?

America, this is serious. The brightest minds in this country are running away from careers in health care. Many of our best doctors are being forced out of

business. We must start an open dialogue with doctors — the individuals who are the most influential in advancing our health care system. The success of our health care system absolutely depends on the caliber of talent we attract to become and remain our nation's physicians. Short-changing the individuals who are sacrificing everything to save lives will lead to the biggest threat to our nation's health care system.

Want to make health care great again? We must all reach out to doctors and do everything in our power to demonstrate that we value our country's physicians before it's too late.

*If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#). Outside of the U.S., please visit the [International Association for Suicide Prevention](#) for a database of resources.*

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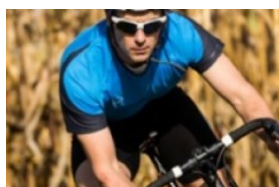
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**Chris Rutherford** · La Grange, Kentucky

Government needs to stay out of healthcare, not fix it. There is another option not mentioned in the article--Direct Care. This model is affordable and works particularly well for primary care. But, even some surgeons (Dr. Keith Smith in Oklahoma) are offering services directly to patients. As a result, true price transparency exists and people are getting better care. Until America gets over the need for "data" and its focus on "population health," I don't see things changing for most physicians. Policy analysts, academic physicians, our medical organizations (who do NOT represent most of us) and special interests care about population health. Everyone else in America values their individuality and relationship with their physician. Opting out of Medicare and starting my own Direct Primary Care practice was the best decision of my career.

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**Erin Schmidt** · Attorney at Bevan & Associates

the problem with this approach is that market systems do not work for healthcare. There is no downward pressure to push prices down and make things competitive.

Why? Because healthcare isn't making the decision on whether you can afford a 45 inch tv or a 60 inch tv.. because if you are on dialysis, well you HAVE to have dialysis.. you can't choose a "lesser" version.




## The Alienation Of America's Best Doctors



The problem is that there is no price people won't pay to save their life, which means demand will NEVER drop due to price.

And offering services directly to patients is all well and good if the patients can afford to pay for it and can afford to pay for it on an ongoing basis. The overwhelming majority of patients can't

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**Gardner Umbarger**



Erin Schmidt This just about sums up the challenge. I also question the idea that physicians even want to go to cash and carry system. Who has time to haggle with patients over the cost of a procedure. It is far more efficient to contract a service for a set price. As for where the money goes, one need only go by their local hospital and view the "real estate of medicine". Those billion dollar buildings have to be paid some way, and hospitals have fixed costs that make health care expensive. If you have an ER, you also have 24/7/365 labs, imaging, pharmacy, nursing, custodial, food service, and all the administrative support. Then there is the debt service.

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**Robert Lanenga** · Moraine Valley Community College

The why is it that the best healthcare systems, see Western Europe, are government controlled?

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**Andilyn Williamson**

As a high school teacher, I have a hard time empathizing with doctors who are less than satisfied with their careers, especially those unsatisfied with the compensation. New doctors barely earn more than minimum wage? I've been teaching 11 years and I STILL earn less than minimum wage when factoring in the number of hours worked. Doctors need to check their privilege at the door. No sympathy here.

Like · Reply · 3 · 21 hrs



**Maggie Elizabeth** · Columbus, Ohio

turning this in to a zero sum game is silly, doctors and teachers both deserve greater compensation, something that is paid attention to in lots of other publications, also it is privilege, no d, but I'm just an overworked and underpaid medical student

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**Salman Ali** · Physician at Fauquier Hospital

A single payer that covered catastrophic costs (hospitalizations, drug costs, emergency/urgent procedures) would go a long way to allowing all Americans to breathe easier with respect to the very real anxiety people have about their health care costs. Beyond that essential level of care, I think a system that allowed direct payment for non-urgent care with price transparency would be reasonable. Doctors would have to work hard to be able to charge whatever they charge, but patients in those non-urgent situations could shop around and decide who they see. Perhaps this is the arena in which p... See More

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**Richard K. Schafer**

Healthcare is a mess in the US... While we keep trying to address medical costs and insurance systems (where DOES all that money go?), we think little about the actual quality of the medicine itself, the actual healthCARE... then, build out from there... let's give the doctors and nurses appropriate compensation within a system that frees them up to focus on what they signed up for... if we started there, and agreed that medical (including mental, btw) care should be a "right" of all people who find themselves within our borders, we would quickly get to what we call "single payer"... and if we did that, our society would not come to an end... it would just be healthier, happier and wealthier...

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**Mark Lewandowski**

Rich- I agree, but doctors want to be millionaires. And most oppose any form of national health care.

They hate the insurers, but oppose government intervention



## The Alienation Of America's Best Doctors



**Mark Lewandowski**

Richard K. Schafer -Every other 1st world nation, and many 2nd world nations, have some form of national healthcare. The lies told about the Canadian system by US conservatives are needed, for without the lies, Americans would realize that the Canadians are largely happy with their system (and it costs the nation far less than ours!).

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**Eric Strong**

Mark Lewandowski "but doctors want to be millionaires" That is absolutely not true. Not



even close. I've been a doctor for 15 years, and I honestly can only think of 1 person for whom attainment of wealth is their primary motivation. Doctors only want our salary to reflect our degree of education (7-15+ years after undergraduate degree), the personal sacrifices we make, and our earning potential in general.

Also, literally every doctor I have ever talked to about the issue is in support of a national health care program.

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**Tim Lundeen**

Of course doctors get stressed -- they don't heal people, that's got to hurt.

The current medical system is totally broken. Licensed doctors are in the business of selling diagnostic tests, pharmaceutical drugs and surgery. Unfortunately, none of these products can give you a long healthy life. (There are rare cases where the current system is better than other options, but they are quite the exception.)

We need a paradigm change: stop poisoning people with environmental toxins (e.g. vaccines, glyphosate, PBDEs, mercury, fluoride, aspartame, etc); stop selling food that causes massive inflammation (e.g. GMOs, omega-6 fats, trans-fats, modern wheat, factory-farmed eggs, meat and fish, etc); change to a functional medicine paradigm that actually tries to heal the patient instead of prescribing life-long drug use.


These changes will dramatically reduce the need for medical care, improve the well-being of ourselves and our kids, and increase healthy lifespan.

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**Bluegrass Family Wellness, PLLC**


I actually took a pay cut to do Direct care. All of you should educate yourselves. We haven't had free market in healthcare in decades.

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**Abe Drayton**

The current system doesn't value anybody - just money.

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