
Price transparency is exactly what the doctor ordered

by Marni Jameson Carey | June 28, 2019 12:04 AM

On behalf of doctors across America and their patients, I am writing to underscore the importance of the executive order President Trump signed this week on “Improving Price and Quality Transparency in Healthcare.” Everyone will benefit from this, save for those who profit from keeping Americans in the dark.

To achieve this critical step toward fixing our sick healthcare system, nothing less than an order from the top will do. Congress was not going to get this done, not so long as the special interests profiting from our opaque system continue to pour millions of dollars into their pockets to maintain the status quo.

In the past 20 years, the American Hospital Association, the American Medical Association, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association, and Blue Cross Blue Shield were among the [top seven lobbying spenders in the nation](#), collectively spending \$1.5 billion to lobby U.S. lawmakers. And that’s just the money we know about. In 2018 alone, they ponied up well over \$20 million each to curry favor.

However, thanks to a few strong, strategic business leaders and a forceful [letter](#) independently signed by nearly 4,000 doctors, Trump this week acknowledged our plea to know the price of our healthcare before we receive it and before we get a bill for a service we can’t return. Interestingly, all we did was ask the White House and the administration to enforce existing laws that allow patients access to real prices. This requirement is written into the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, but the requirements of both laws have been conveniently bypassed thanks to all the lobbying mentioned above.

Although the stroke of the president’s pen is an excellent start, we are far from done. The special interests are lobbied up and lawyered up to fight price and quality transparency at every step. They’re afraid that once patients have access to information about real prices and real outcomes, they can begin to shop for value, the way they do in every other industry.

That will create a competitive market and will steer consumers away from large health systems that layer in facility fees and consolidate by buying up doctors, other hospitals, and retail health clinics in order to gain market control and bargaining power with insurance companies. Once patients can choose to have a baby for \$5,000 instead of \$42,000, or an MRI for \$350 instead of \$3500, someone is going to lose money.

Our hope is that by rallying physicians across America and unifying them to do what is best for patients, we can put an end to a system that is making egregious amounts of money off their backs. Only then will our broken healthcare system begin to heal.

Let's pause to celebrate this momentous victory. Tomorrow, we continue the fight.

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