

Who Owns Your Doctor

Transcript

When I was in high school, one of my teachers told me I should be a doctor. So I started college as a pre-med student, and joined the pre-med club. We had a local doctor come tell us what it was like to practice medicine. And he said, “Pretty soon we will have socialized medicine, and you won’t be making the treatment decisions. Somebody else will tell you what you can get paid to do.”

Things turned out a little differently. I decided physics would be more fun than medicine. And the majority of medical practices are now run by corporations, not by the government. But that doctor back in the 70's had one thing right: all too often, somebody else tells doctors what to do. Hospitals and private equity own the majority of practices, and insurance companies decide what doctors get paid for and how much they get paid.

We do have socialized medicine for the military and for veterans who get health care through the Veterans' Administration. The doctors who work for the military and the VA are employees of the federal government.

Medicare and Medicaid are single payer systems, where the government collects taxes and pays for health care claims, but the health care providers are either in private practice or they work for corporations.

The American Medical Association warns physicians about “Corporate Intrusion” and a law firm offers to help doctors who feel disempowered.

I found one article supporting corporate ownership of medical practice. This author says investment by private equity can promote innovation and new technology for some types of medical practice.

The AMA reports that doctors who sold their practices to a corporation in the last 10 years gave 3 main reasons: one was access to expensive resources, as the Harvard Gazette author explained. The other two are about dealing with insurance: too much paperwork for too little money.

Most of the corporate owners of medical practices are hospitals, or health systems that include hospitals. That's for the next video.