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On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3225

Protections currently existing with OHA's Health Care Market Oversight program are not sufficient. We need legislation which will protect our health care from being controlled by entities whose responsibility is to shareholders rather than patients.

On Aug 22, 2023 I emailed OHA's Health Care Market Oversight program (HCMOP) about the problems caused by United Health Care's Optum arm buying Oregon Medical Group (OMG) from its doctor-owners in late 2020. Many of my doctors up until the summer of 2023 were with Oregon Medical Group. Optum is described online as "a health care provider monopoly."

As of the date of my email to OHA, I had either lost or had been informed of a date certain when I would lose my dermatologist, my access to receive anesthesia with procedures done by my pain doctor, and my pain doctor. All were forced out by Optum effectively closing their departments after shrinking staff and increasing caseloads. OMG never even notified us that our doctor had left OMG, and OMG would not tell us where she was now practicing, and also told us that they could not provide us with a new PCP.

Former OMG doctors had also been coerced into signing non-compete agreements which barred them from practicing in Lane county, Oregon, for one year after their employment was terminated.

In addition to losing doctors whom I trusted and who had been taking good care of me (and in some cases they were my husband's doctors too) -- doctors who are well educated, trained, and experienced -- there were few or no options in Eugene/Springfield to replace my doctors and continue my care.

I asked OHA's HCMOP to explain why Optum was permitted to buy Oregon Medical Group. HCMOP's mission includes review of "proposed business deals to make sure they will help-and not hurt-Oregon's shared goals of health equity, lower consumer costs, increased access, and better care." These goals are all in opposition to what Optum does, repeatedly, all over the country. Optum and United Health Care are profit driven entities with their shareholders ever increasing profits their primary concern and one could argue, duty. This is predatory capitalism run amok. Private equity, with OHA's imprimatur, is being allowed to interfere with my access to doctors in my community who can deliver care to me.

I had spoken to other providers and employees of OMG. The OMG employees were clearly under stress due to the changing expectations since the Optum takeover of OMG. Profit, not patient care and the wellbeing of employees, was described the primary concern of the parent entity. Doctors and other caregivers are suffering by being in a system run for profit which does not allow them to honor their Hippocratic oath.

A very fine piece about this problem was published by the New York Times on July 14, 2023, entitled "The Moral Crisis of America's Doctors" by Blasz Gardi, subtitled "The corporatization of health care has changed the practice of medicine, causing many physicians to feel alienated from their work."

I asked OHA why United Healthcare was allowed to do this. OHA responded on Aug 24, "The Health Care Market Oversight (HCMO) program launched on March 1, 2022. Because this transaction was completed before the program's launch, it did not undergo HCMO review." OHA added, "HCMO's reviews consider the potential impacts of business deals on access to care, costs, quality, and health equity, which encompasses many of the concerns you raise."

However, OHA then approved the sale of Corvallis Clinic to Optum after March 1, 2022, claiming a financial emergency which United Healthcare itself caused. A data breach suffered by another of United Health Care's arms resulted in a bottleneck in payment from insurance to doctors, which UHC then exploited to buy up more doctors' offices when they ran out of operating capital, in order to bleed them of their value and ruin them for their patients.

Unrestrained private equity is killing our access to health care.