

Submitter: David and Judith Berg
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB951
Oregon Senators,

Thank you for your service to the citizens of Oregon and thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of SB 951 to alleviate the unethical and unscrupulous conflict of interest imposed on the practice of medicine in Oregon by mega corporations seeking profit at the expense of patients.

In or about 2003, our Primary Care Provider (PCP) at the time joined Oregon Medical Group (OMG) to achieve the economies of scale of medical administration in a clinic setting so he could focus entirely on serving his patients. Our doctor was totally a patient's physician – in the manner we came to expect and cherish from days of old. His patients loved him; waiting to see him was never a complaint; each patient knew (s)he would get the same patient-centric care as those who preceded them. We didn't hesitate one moment to follow him to OMG.

During the ensuing years, our doctor gradually gave in to pressure to shorten patient visits in the face of insurance-imposed limits; by 2015, after walking a delicate balance of giving his patients his customary care within constraints ultimately imposed by insurance company imperatives, he succumbed and resigned, unable to fulfill his self-imposed standard of ethical care to his patients.

By 2020, we had already been through three subsequent primary care providers at OMG, when we landed in our latest PCP's office. He, too, is a patient's physician; he, too, was constrained by policies emanating from insurance company imperatives. He, too, eventually resigned.

In 2020, United Health Care (UHC), dba Optum, quietly acquired OMG. Imagine! A health insurer owning the medical practice whose patients it insures! Talk about the fox guarding the henhouse. Duh! "How could this egregious conflict of interest be consummated?" we wondered, and without publicity.

By 2023, the transformation of OMG from a health care provider to a UHC profit center was complete. At our last visit to our then-current PCP in October 2023, he told us he resigned effective the end of the year. He had been asked to yet again shorten patient visits and see more patients. He, too, was no longer able to meet his ethical standards of patient care. He was not alone. In early 2024, we were among the tens of OMG patients to receive "the letter" announcing the resignation of their PCPs and that we would need to seek primary care elsewhere. OMG's Southtowne

clinic closed entirely. Attempts to secure a PCP elsewhere were met with sympathetic looks and waiting lists, or “not accepting new patients [with Medicare]”. Ultimately, we landed on our feet and secured competent primary care. Others may not have been as fortunate. We just learned that OMG’s Chase Gardens Clinic also recently closed and its patients also received “the letter.”

What happened to Oregon Medical Group – and also to Greenfield Health and The Corvallis Clinic – is now a story of legend. That The Corvallis Clinic was pushed to the literal brink of insolvency at the hands of UHC and its subsidiaries is pathetic testimony to the unethical and unscrupulous business practices of a mega-corporation engaged in a blatant conflict of interest to generate profit at the expense of the patients ostensibly in their care.

We incorporate by reference essays by Dr. John Kitzhaber, “Oregon should battle the hostile takeover of its health care system” in February 2024, and “Selling Oregon’s Health Care System to the Highest Bidder” in March. They speak eloquently to the problem. Much similar content has been written in various media since then.

Senate Bill 951 – and its companion bills HB 3225, HB 3227, and HB 3234 – address themselves to this issue. They deserve hearing and ultimate passage by the Oregon Legislature and the Governor. We wholeheartedly support them and urge their passage.

Respectfully submitted,

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