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Lane County patients turned away from Oregon Medical Group in possible corporate pinch



By Rebecca Hansen-White (KLCC)

April 9, 2024 6 a.m.

Thousands of patients in the Eugene Springfield area say they've been dropped by health care provider Oregon Medical Group, leaving them without primary care. They fear decisions made by out-of-state corporate owners may be to blame.



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Oregon Medical Group's Southtowne Clinic closed in March. Optum, the organization's parent company, says providers and staff have been moved to other locations.

Rebecca Hansen-White / KLCC

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Dan Gleason, a locally-known, retired University of Oregon professor, has struggled with diabetes most of his adult life.

Over the last few years, he survived leukemia and has been diagnosed with several illnesses linked to diabetes.

He said a specialist at Oregon Medical Group helped him get the condition under control because she knew him well.

“I had some infections in my feet, and there was a correlation with that particular drug,” he said. “She knew that, and she knew my history, so she could say, ‘No, you’re not going in that direction.’”

Gleason found out a few weeks ago he is no longer allowed to see his doctor.

“For many years, I didn’t get particularly good specialized care for diabetes,” he said. “Now, we’re being pushed away.”

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Corporate interests

Gleason is among potentially thousands of patients that Oregon Medical Group unexpectedly turned away. Many were told their doctor had left and were provided a list of other clinics in the area. At the same time, Oregon Medical Group closed its Southtowne Clinic.

Gleason said he was told that a change of insurance was to blame, and if he switched back to an insurer owned by Oregon Medical Group's parent company, he would be able to continue seeing his doctor.

Oregon Medical Group is owned by Optum, the single largest [employer](#) of physicians in the US, since 2020. Optum is also in the midst of [acquiring The Corvallis Clinic](#) as well. The emergency sale was approved despite hundreds of letters in opposition, many citing challenges at Oregon Medical Group.

Optum's parent company, UnitedHealth Group, has also been in the news recently for a costly and massive [cyberattack](#) that has left providers struggling to reimburse insurance payments for medical care.

In an emailed statement, Optum said it was doing its best to transfer patients in Eugene to other providers and had made a waiting list available for patients who would like to stay with Oregon Medical Group. It's also working to establish a virtual health team for e-visits and telehealth appointments.

"The health and well-being of our patients is our top priority, and we are working with patients to ensure they have access to high-quality care," the statement read.

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Optum said the Southtowne Clinic closed when its lease expired, and all staff were transferred to other locations.

Jane Zhu, a health services researcher at Oregon Health and Sciences University, said small practices in Oregon may seek mergers with large organizations that can take on the growing burden of billing and digital record keeping.



Barbara, left, and Dan Gleason, right, pictured with their dog Aldi in March. The couple said they are no longer able to see their Oregon Medical Group doctor because

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She said the first merger may leave local physicians with some control, but that can disappear as providers [consolidate](#) further.

“When we see consolidation in the market, what we see most often is higher commercial prices without any definitive positive effects on quality, and really unclear effects on access to care and workforce,” she said.

In the recent legislative session, Rep. Ben Bowman, D-Tigard, [introduced a bill](#) that would have required physicians to retain majority control over businesses like independent medical clinics. It would have also required providers to be transparent about ownership.

A lack of restrictions on corporate ownership has left many without the care they rely on, Bowman told KLCC.

“What’s happening in Eugene right now is the outcome of that arrangement, which is that physicians are fleeing, they’re leaving,” he said.

According to Lane County Medical Society, 32 doctors have left Oregon Medical Group since March 2022. The organization has not tracked how many are still practicing at other clinics in the Eugene area.

“And the consequences of that at a time when we don’t have enough primary care providers as it is,” said Bowman. “Hundreds, maybe thousands, maybe over 10,000 patients no longer have a primary care doc.”

Bowman’s bill died last session, and he plans to reintroduce it next year.

In the meantime, many patients in Eugene, such as Stephanie, fear they’ll see an interruption in care that they depend on. KLCC agreed to only use Stephanie’s first name to protect her medical privacy.

She said she found out her primary care provider had left Oregon Medical Group when she called to make an appointment and a staff member told her she was no longer a patient.

“You’re a facility that’s in charge of all these, doctors, people’s lives,” Stephanie said. “I just don’t understand how they

The Oregon Medical Group doctor who Stephanie has seen for 17 years advised her through a genetic disease, an autoimmune disorder and, recently, testing for another life-changing condition.

“The complications of what I’m going through, along with not having a doctor,” she said. “I just cannot express the anxiety that this is causing me.”

For now, Stephanie is working to find a doctor who is taking new patients and will add her family to the list.

Optum said that patients on Medicaid who need assistance finding a primary care provider can call Lane County Health & Human Services at 541-682-3550. They can also call 541-242-4311 and staff will provide a list of non-OMG community resources for support.

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