MD Life

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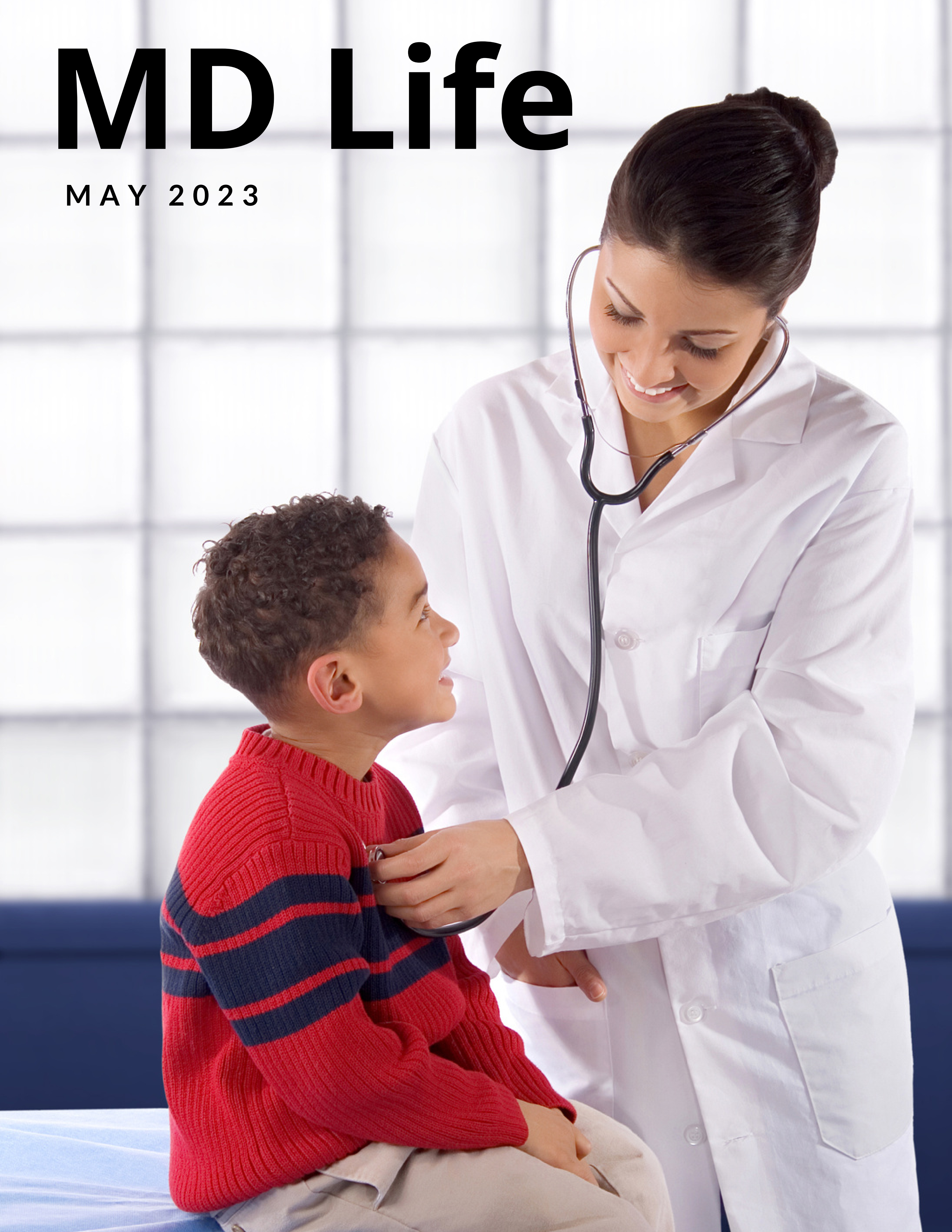

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Physicians In Crisis: How Wage-Fixing in Health Care is Limiting Compensation and Driving Doctors Away

AARON MORGENSTEIN, MD & ALLISON NAZINITSKY, MD

Physicians are frustrated, and rightfully so, by the number of individuals and companies that do not provide direct medical care to patients yet profit off our services. Salary suppression is one of the many reasons physicians are leaving traditional medicine and seeking alternative careers. Although physicians have seen an increase in pay over the past 20 years, it has not matched the inflation rate. For example, Medicare reimbursement lags over 20 percent behind inflation. The reality is that physicians are being asked to work harder without seeing salaries rise accordingly. This has got us thinking: Is there a collusive effort in health care to keep physician salaries low while still requiring us to take on the liability of practicing medicine?

Insurance companies, government entities, and other health care stakeholders may be working together to limit physicians from earning competitive salaries that align with our education, training, and expertise.

Is there wage-fixing in health care?

Colluding against physicians to pay them less would be a serious charge against all parties involved in our health care system. Wage-fixing is a violation of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Act and is a felony offense. Shall we consider an indictment against those working to limit and suppress physician compensation? It's unlikely that investigators would find binding agreements between entities to support an indictment, but let's expose some of the elements we might consider in our prosecution of the health care industry in this hypothetical case.

Hypothetical case #1: Physicians (plaintiff) vs. health care industry (defendant)

In this hypothetical case, U.S. physicians accuse the health care industry of wage-fixing to prioritize financial gains over appropriate compensation, which violates antitrust laws and the FTC Act and is subject to penalties and fines. Wage fixing in health care has been used to artificially suppress the labor market, reduce competition amongst employers, and potentially increase employer profits at the expense of physicians.

The arguments against the health care industry

Argument #1: Physician compensation is unique in that it is limited by the federal government based on fair market value (FMV) to prevent fraudulent behavior as a part of Stark Laws. Health care organizations determine FMV through market analysis and benchmarking, comparing physicians' compensation in the same specialty and region. However, this approach can be flawed as it allows facilities to work indirectly with each other to limit salary increases in response to demand, workload, and inflation.

Argument #2: Physician compensation is limited by the State legislatures and courtrooms that continue to allow health care facilities to enforce "non-compete" clauses. Physician contracts that include non-compete clauses are an unjust practice by medical facilities that have been shown to limit compensation. Non-compete clauses for physicians reduce job opportunities, lessen mobility, and lower negotiating power to limit compensation.

Argument #3: National physician compensation surveys from MGMA, SullivanCotter, AMGA, and Gallagher rely solely on data submitted by health care facilities without physician input. This lack of physician involvement raises concerns about the authenticity of the data obtained. It allows facilities to potentially collude and limit physician compensation without considering actual pay, work environment, hours, and workload.

Argument #4: Anti-trust laws prevent physician-run compensation surveys that share salary information among physicians, as it may be considered wage fixing. However, medical facilities can share data about physician salaries to establish benchmark data for compensation purposes, raising questions as to why physicians cannot host their own surveys.

Argument #5: Health care facilities continue collaborating with staffing agencies to avoid increasing physician compensation, despite the Stark Law revisions of 2020. The revised laws defined "commercial reasonability," which allows medical facilities to contract directly with physicians if it serves a legitimate business purpose, even if it does not yield a profit. However, medical facilities continue to rely on costly management companies and staffing agencies to avoid paying physicians more for working directly with them.

Argument #6: Physician compensation is being limited by state legislatures that are allowing NP and PA role expansion and autonomy. As the number of NPs and PAs grows, they will compete with physicians for certain job opportunities and patient care responsibilities. This will create more competition for physicians, reducing their bargaining power and limiting their ability to negotiate higher compensation. Furthermore, physicians are consistently expected to supervise NPs and PAs without receiving commensurate compensation, which is unprecedented in most other industries.

Argument #7: Medicare is reducing physician reimbursement rates, with a 2 percent decrease in 2023 and a projected 1.25 percent decrease in 2024. Furthermore, a significant portion of Medicare funds is funneled through large, for-profit insurance companies, such as United Healthcare, Molina, and Humana, rather than directly to physicians.

Argument #8: RVUs as a reimbursement method to limit physician compensation by Medicare and insurance companies is flawed, as it does not always correspond to the complexity of patient care and time spent with patients. Additionally, Medicare and insurance companies can decrease the value assigned to an RVU annually, resulting in lower reimbursement for physician services.

Argument #9: Reimbursement rates from insurance companies for physician services favor health care facilities rather than the physician that provide those services. Facility fees to the patients are much more than the physician fees for outpatient examinations and procedures.

Argument #10: The quantity of work physicians do without compensation would be deemed unacceptable in most other professions. They attend numerous meetings throughout the day and work outside regular hours to fulfill their documentation obligations, but their compensation does not rise accordingly.

Argument #11: In some instances, physicians are forced by legal and ethical obligations to provide free patient care without reimbursement. What other industries require businesses to provide services without reimbursement?

Closing argument

Post-COVID, physicians are expected to see more complex patients and work longer hours, but the health care industry fails to compensate them appropriately, in contrast to other industries and inflation. Our hypothetical collusion case against the health care industry demonstrates how physician compensation is being limited and suppressed for the benefit of others. Such collusion could have serious consequences for patient care quality, as it may exacerbate the physician shortage resulting from health care leaders' lack of respect for the profession.

Aaron Morgenstein is a board-certified orthopedic surgeon and founder, FlexMedStaff.com, a fully transparent and free marketplace for physicians to find new clinical and non-clinical opportunities to improve work-life balance. Contact Aaron here.

Corinne Sundar Rao is a board-certified internal medicine physician and founder, Legacy Physicians, which helps hospitals find well-qualified physicians at a much lower overhead than they would pay staffing agencies. She can be reached on LinkedIn and Facebook.
Allison Nazinitsky is an infectious disease physician.

3 Google Changes You Need to Know About

BY ALBERT KHOURY, KOMANDO.COM

It's getting warmer, and you're probably itching to hit the road. With gas prices still high, who doesn't want to save money? And while you're at it, getting to your destination faster would be nice, wouldn't it?

Are you a Google fan? Maybe you're not, but you're used to using Gmail, Docs, Chrome and more at home or work. For better or worse, Google's apps and services are among the most popular worldwide. And like any Big Tech company, Google constantly evolves to keep everyone on the hook. Here are some changes coming to Authenticator, Workspace and Gmail.

Google Authenticator gets cloud support

Let's say you lose your phone, and that happens to be where your one-time authenticator codes are stored. You won't be able to log in to any other device without them.

Thanks to a Google Authenticator update, those codes are now stored on your Google Account. Now you can still sign into any device or service using the Authenticator app. It's about time!

You can't take advantage of the app's new features until you update it:

On iPhone:

- Open the **App Store** and tap your **profile icon**.
- Tap **Update** next to **Google Authenticator**.

On Android:

- Open the **Google Play Store** app and tap your **profile icon**.
- Tap **Manage apps & device**, then **Update** next to **Google Authenticator**.

Once you've updated Google Authenticator, you'll be prompted to log in to your Google account when you open the new version of the app.

Your codes will automatically be backed up and restored on any new device you use. So when you set up a new phone and log in to your account, your codes will be ready to go without setup.

Workspace gets a better toolbox

You'll appreciate this if you're a Google Docs, Sheets and Slides junkie (or use these apps at work). When you want to change the page setup in Docs, merge cells in Sheets, or edit a theme in Slides, you must sift through toolbars and menus to find the action. That's not the case anymore.

Google's adding a tool finder at the top of these apps that automatically offers suggestions for common actions like the ones listed above.

If that's not enough, you can plug in what you're looking for by name or description. Let's say you want to delete a column in Sheets. Simply type in something like "remove column B" and click on the action when it appears in the search bar.

Clicking into the tool finder brings up your previously used actions, too.

The update is rolling out. You'll know you have it when you see a pill-shaped field with a magnifying glass marked **Menu** at the top-left of the toolbar.

It's easier to log into third-party apps via Gmail (but still a bad idea)

Many Big Tech companies let you use your credentials with them to log into third-party apps and services. They usually explain that it will "enhance your experience" or something along those lines.

Gmail is no exception. But if you have two-factor authentication (2FA) enabled for your Google account (**which you always should**), you'll have problems connecting to apps that aren't compatible with it.

Google added App Passwords to get around this. Rather than using your Google account password, passcodes are generated to give a "less secure app" (**Google's words**) permission to access your Google account. *Yikes.*

Google recommends using "Sign in with Google" to connect apps to your Google Account rather than using App Passwords. But we have better advice:

You shouldn't use your Google account to log into any app, especially one that rejects 2FA. Use unique credentials for all your accounts instead. While you're at it, **here's how to check which apps already have access to your account**.

From Addiction to Exclusion: A Physician's Struggle for Redemption

JEFFREY L. FRASER, MD

Many consequences can happen to a physician who has faced the disease of addiction. One of the worst is to be placed on the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) exclusion list, which prohibits billing for both Medicare and Medicaid. During my hydrocodone addiction, I diverted the medication by writing prescriptions to my patients, who would bring the pills back to me for my use. I was charged with a felony, pleaded guilty after two years of wasted time in negotiations, and was placed on four years of probation.

After two years, my probation was ended thanks to my probation officer advocating for me to the judge. Thirteen months after I had pleaded guilty, I received a bombshell letter in the regular mail from the OIG informing me I was placed on the exclusion list for five years because of my felony conviction. This came nine months after I had been fully credentialed for both Medicare and Medicaid with full disclosure of my felony and history of drug addiction and nearly five years since I last diverted a narcotic. I was practicing family medicine in a small town in North Carolina at the time, and I maintain medical licenses in both North Carolina and Nebraska that have been rendered worthless.

There are several ways to respond when placed on the OIG exclusion list. An appeal can be filed within 60 days of receipt of the letter. I was informed by my attorney and the hospital administration not to file an appeal because they were going to seek a waiver of the exclusion since I was practicing in an underserved area. I was instructed to sit tight and keep seeing patients. Three weeks after I received the notice, I was terminated because the CEO who had signed my contract said he did not know I was a felon when they hired me.

My licensing attorney was friends with the entire administration, and he initiated conversations and described my history, which led to their interest in hiring me. I personally informed the same people, and I was interviewed in person, and a contract was offered and signed. The office submitted the credentialing forms under the direction of the chief operating officer and included my history of felony and addiction. They had complete and indisputable knowledge of my history. During the month after receiving my termination notice signed by the vice president and delivered in person by the COO, there were multiple attempts to convince the CEO to change his mind. These attempts were unsuccessful, and the CEO kept to the story; he did not know I was a felon. I wrote a letter of appeal and called the OIG exclusion office, but they informed me the appeal time had expired.

There are three ways to overcome the OIG exclusion. You can file an appeal. You can obtain a waiver from the same people who excluded you, and I will describe this process and its futility. A presidential pardon will remove the felony, and the OIG exclusion is then ended. The state Medicaid director for both states I have medical licenses has submitted requests for a waiver. The OIG has granted a Medicaid waiver, but Medicare has denied it for small, underserved communities in both states. I have been talking with the small town of Aurora, Nebraska, which has three full-time physicians and one part-time. Medicare denied the waiver request because they said there were 49 family physicians in Aurora and 14 unique family practice offices in town. (There is one practice, and there never were or will be that many physicians in Aurora; according to Nebraska DHHS, there are only seven physicians in the entire county.)

They also said there are 348 family doctors in a town 30 miles away and 114 unique family practice offices. When confronted with the inaccurate numbers, the OIG exclusion office said they do not dispute the numbers from the Medicare people. A similar response was received for a town of 200 people in rural North Carolina. So two communities with difficulty recruiting and maintaining physicians cannot receive the care they deserve, and I was willing to provide.

My request for a presidential pardon was supported by a Nebraska Congressman that is no longer in office, so I was informed the request is just sitting in the Department of Justice. Not one Nebraska Congressman or Senator is willing to help, some have directly said no, and most will not return multiple phone calls or emails. Before me, no physician in Nebraska had been indicted for diverting, stealing, or buying illegal drugs on the street. The U.S. attorney who prosecuted me has a history of two DUIs and is recovering from an alcohol use disorder. My licensing attorney in North Carolina informed me no physician had been indicted for diverting a narcotic.

If you are charged with a felony, my advice is not to accept a plea deal. I believe a jury would have understood the disease of addiction and the resulting behaviors better than our legal system. I have been in recovery for 62 months, and I cannot practice my profession.

Jeffrey L. Fraser is a family physician.

The Red Marbles

I was at the corner grocery store buying some early potatoes. I noticed a small boy, delicate of bone and feature, ragged but clean, hungrily apprising a basket of freshly picked green peas.

I paid for my potatoes but was also drawn to the display of fresh green peas. I am a pushover for creamed peas and new potatoes. Pondering the peas, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation between Mr. Miller (the store owner) and the ragged boy next to me.

"Hello Barry, how are you today?" "H'lo, Mr. Miller. Fine, thank ya. Jus' admirin' them peas. They sure look good." "They are good, Barry. How's your Ma?" "Fine. Gittin' stronger alla' time."

"Good. Anything I can help you with?""No, Sir. Jus' admirin' them peas." "Would you like take some home?" asked Mr. Miller. "No, Sir. Got nuthin' to pay for 'em with."

"Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?" "All I got's my prize marble here." "Is that right? Let me see it" said Miller. "Here 'tis. She's a dandy." "I can see that. Hmmmmm, only thing is this one is blue, and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?" the store owner asked. "Not zackley but almost."

"Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you and next trip this way let me look at that red marble," Mr. Miller told the boy. "Sure will. Thanks Mr. Miller."

Mrs. Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help me. With a smile she said, "There are two other boys like him in town, all three are in very poor circumstances. Jim just loves to bargain with them for peas, apples, tomatoes, or whatever. When they come back with their red marbles, and they always do, he decides he doesn't like red after all and he sends them home with a bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one, when they come on their next trip to the store."

I left the store, smiling to myself, impressed with this man. A short time later I moved to Colorado, but I never forgot the story of this man, the boys, and their bartering for marbles.

Several years went by, each more rapid than the previous one. Just recently I had occasion to visit some old friends in that Idaho community and, while I was there, learned that Mr. Miller had died. They were having his visitation that evening and, knowing my friends wanted to go, I agreed to accompany them. Upon arrival at the mortuary, we fell into line to meet the relatives of the deceased and to offer whatever words of comfort we could.

Ahead of us in line were three young men. One was in an army uniform and the other two had nice haircuts, wore dark suits and white shirts... all very professional looking. They approached Mrs. Miller, standing composed and smiling by her husband's casket. Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket.

Her misty light-blue eyes followed them as, one by one, each young man stopped briefly and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary awkwardly, wiping his eyes.

Our turn came to meet Mrs. Miller. I told her who I was and reminded her of the story from those many years ago and what she had told me about her husband's bartering for marbles. With her eyes glistening, she took my hand and led me to the casket.

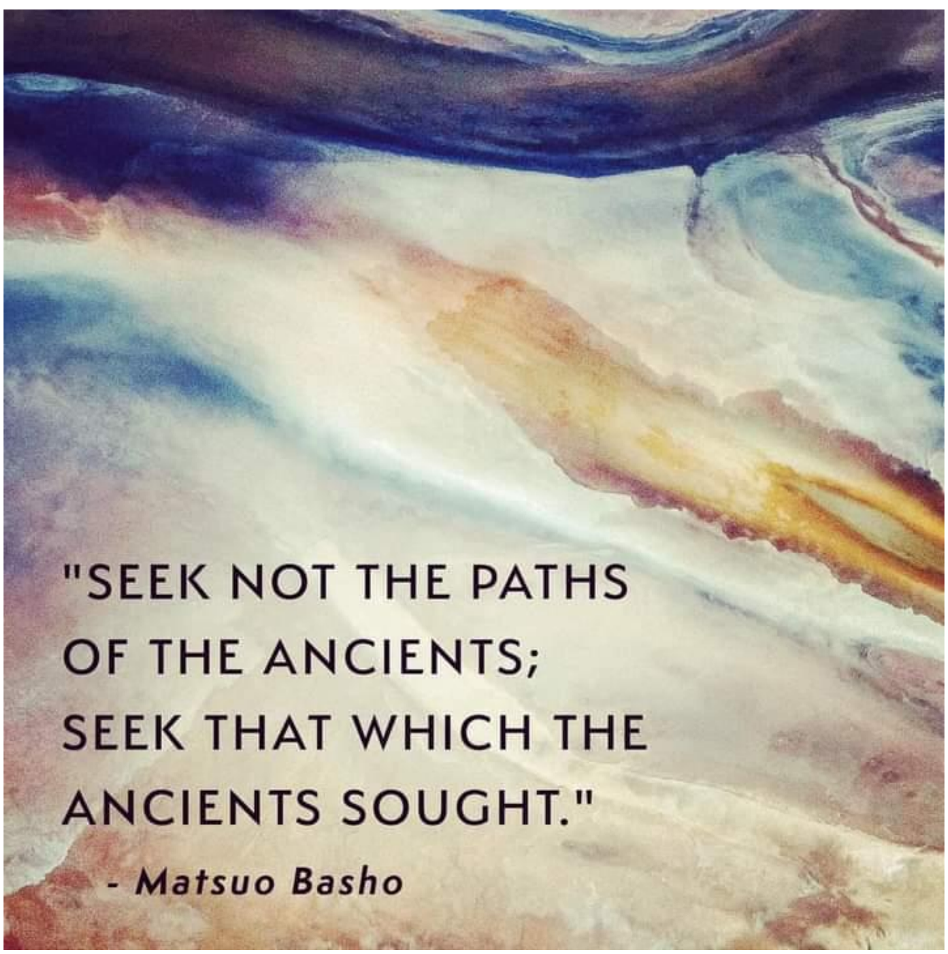
"Those three young men who just left were those boys. They just told me how they appreciated the things Jim "traded" them. Now, at last, when Jim could not change his mind about color or size... they came to pay their debt."

"We've never had a great deal of the wealth of this world," she confided, "but right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho."

With loving gentleness, she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three exquisitely shined red marbles.

We will not be remembered by our words, but by our kind deeds. Today I wish you a day of ordinary miracles. A fresh pot of coffee you didn't make yourself. An unexpected phone call from an old friend. Green stoplights on your way to work. The fastest line at the grocery store. A good sing-along song on the radio. Your keys found right where you left them.

Never be in way too much of a hurry to even notice the ordinary miracles when they occur.



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The Insurance Denial Process: One Oncologist's Fight Against a Broken System

JENNIFER LYCETTE, MD

It is 4:15 p.m. in my clinic, and I'm running an hour behind. One of my morning patients arrived acutely ill and thus required more of my time and attention than the schedule allotted for. Accordingly, every patient after that has ended up waiting for me. And, as I'm a cancer physician, each of them requires—and deserves—all my time and energy. There are no "easy" visits here.

By the end of the afternoon, I've given up on any possibility of catching up and inform my staff to tell every patient to expect a long wait. I have two more patients to go when I get a direct message from someone in our "prior authorization" department.

The DM tells me that the appeal phone call for a denial of coverage for one of my other patients is now scheduled – for right this moment. I sigh in defeat. The insurance company doesn't take calls after 5:00 p.m., so I can't request to make the call after I finish with my already waiting patients. And worse, if I don't take the time they're offering now, they will close the appeal, and we'll have to start over from the beginning, which will take time. Time the patient doesn't have.

I message my medical assistant to tell the remaining patients I'm being held up further. From my office, I call the number for the "peer-to-peer." However, although the term is "peer-to-peer," in my experience, the physician I talk to will rarely be of my same specialty. I may need to explain the intricacies of oncology to, say, a cardiologist or a radiologist. After all the time and effort to schedule the appeal call, one might think I could instantly reach the physician on the other end. One would be wrong.

I go through a phone tree. When a person finally picks up, I give the disembodied voice the demographics of my patient and their case number. Then I'm put on hold again. After several precious minutes—in which I picture my remaining patients poking their heads into the halls to ask my staff where I am and point out how long they've been waiting—another non-physician voice comes on the line, only to tell me they're putting me on hold again. Several more minutes tick by, during which I try to catch up on some charting, but the hold music is too distracting. I don't dare try to change the volume or phone settings in case I accidentally disconnect the call.

Finally, the insurance physician picks up. I glance at the ticking digital timer on the phone base. Twelve minutes have elapsed. I take a deep breath and calmly explain my patient's situation and the treatment I've prescribed. What I've given up on saying on these calls is that all of this is written out in my patient's chart in a very detailed manner, as are all my patients' treatment plans. Physicians spend years of training on how to properly document their clinical rationale.

After discussion, the insurance company physician agrees to authorize my patient's treatment. As is typical for most of these denials, they explain that their company didn't greenlight it in the first place because they couldn't find the right "checkbox" on their "approved list." These rote lists may serve well for "common" cancers, but in oncology, especially in my rural, underserved practice, I find more patients than not don't neatly fit the checkboxes. None of my patients are common; each is unique. An individual human being.

So when I saw the recent article by ProPublica that details how a major insurance company instructed its employed physicians to deny coverage of treatments and services without ever reviewing the medical record, I had zero surprise. My clinical experience has long led me to suspect such a knee-jerk denial of services. The insurance companies are playing a game of attrition—counting on the fact that most denials will not be appealed.

In my specialty of cancer medicine, however, it isn't simply a matter of cost or preferring a generic brand of medication to a brand name. These are too often life-and-death situations where time is of the essence.One thing stands out when I reflect on the hundreds of "peer-to-peer" appeal calls I've made over the past decade. I have never failed to overturn the denial.

It is beyond egregious that the insurance companies have been allowed to get away with this for so long. The companies don't see the consequences of their denials or what the appeals cost us. For physicians, appeals cost time and energy. It takes us away from other patients, who suffer the stress and inconvenience of extra waiting. And the gaslighting of our medical expertise contributes to the ongoing epidemic of physician burnout via moral injury.

For the patients who receive an initial denial, even when the appeal is successful, it causes the harm and suffering of being told their care might not be covered and wondering how they will pay for treatments necessary to save their lives. Will they face such impossible choices as selling their home and going bankrupt to afford their cancer treatment? Choosing between food or medicine? It forces them to confront the reality that our medical system doesn't consider them inherently "worthy" of care. Even after we win the appeal, these mental harms cannot be undone.

For the past several years, out of necessity, I have given every new patient up-front a short speech. I explain how the insurance denial process works and that they, unfortunately, may receive a letter, even before I do, that their treatment is being denied. I then end the speech by telling them not to worry; as their cancer physician, I will appeal it and succeed.

It's beyond time that our medical organizations and government stand up to these insurance behemoths the same way we individual physicians do. Before we're all burned out and used up—and none of us are left.

Jennifer Lycette is a novelist, award-winning essayist, rural hematology-oncology physician, wife, and mom (to three humans and two of the canine persuasion). She can be reached on Twitter @JL_Lycette, Mastodon @, and LinkedIn. Her first novel, The Algorithm Will See You Now (Black Rose Writing Press), a near-future medical thriller, is out in paperback and ebook. Her second novel (title and cover reveal coming soon!) will be out in November 2023.

An Ashville Home Tour – An Ideal Luxury Mountain Home With Expansive Outlook

Asheville, North Carolina is a vibrant city situated in the Blue Ridge Mountains in the western portion of North Carolina. It is known for its unparalleled architecture, its amazing natural features, and its delicious dining opportunities. It is also home to a burgeoning real estate market with plenty of luxury options available.

Asheville has a population of approximately 95,000 people living at an elevation of 2,134 feet, or 650 meters. The city has a population density of approximately 2,000 people per square mile.

Asheville has a wide variety of popular attractions that bring visitors from all over the country. One of the biggest attractions is the Biltmore Estate, which s the largest home in the United States. It spans more than 8,000 acres and it was constructed by George Vanderbilt. It is a beautiful place to explore at any time of the year, but there are a lot of special events that take place around the holidays.

Asheville is also home to the North Carolina Arboretum, one of the most beautiful botanical gardens in the country. The Arboretum has flowers, plants, and trees from all over the world, so this is a great opportunity for people to learn more about nature. This is also a fun place to host events, particularly weddings.

The city is home to a wide variety of breweries as well, with one of the most popular being New Belgium. New Belgium Brewing Company is known for its flagship beer, Fat Tire, but they also have plenty of other delicious options available for people who are of age. The brewery also provides tours for people during the day, and it is a popular place to host events.

Asheville is also a great location for people who love pinball. The city is home to one of the largest pinball museums in the world, and there are plenty of rotating exhibits at the museum. Even for those who don't love pinball, this is a great opportunity to explore creative designs.

The Blue Ridge Mountains are known for their outdoor opportunities, and Asheville is no different. The city is home to endless hiking trails, but some of the best ones are located along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Anyone who wants to get in touch with nature should consider going for a hike or a bike ride along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Along the way, there are beautiful waterfalls to stop and admire. The state of the waterfalls can vary depending on the season, so it might even be a good idea to sign up for a professionally guided tour. Those who want to swing from the treetops might also be interested in a zipline tour.

Asheville is known for its strong school system. Some of the best high schools in Asheville include Asheville High School and Reynolds High School. Asheville has several strong private schools as well, including The Asheville School, which also provides boarding opportunities to students.

Because of everything that Asheville has to offer, there are luxury properties available in beautiful neighborhoods. The downtown neighborhood is perfect for families who want to live close to the heart of the action. It provides easy access to shopping and dining opportunities. The Biltmore Park area is perfect for those who want to live close to the Biltmore Estate. It provides easy access to special events that take place throughout the year. Haw Creek and Lakeview Park are ideal for families who want to have easy access to hiking trails, waterfalls, and bike paths.

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\$3,395,00

4508 ft^2

TOTAL BEDS **4**

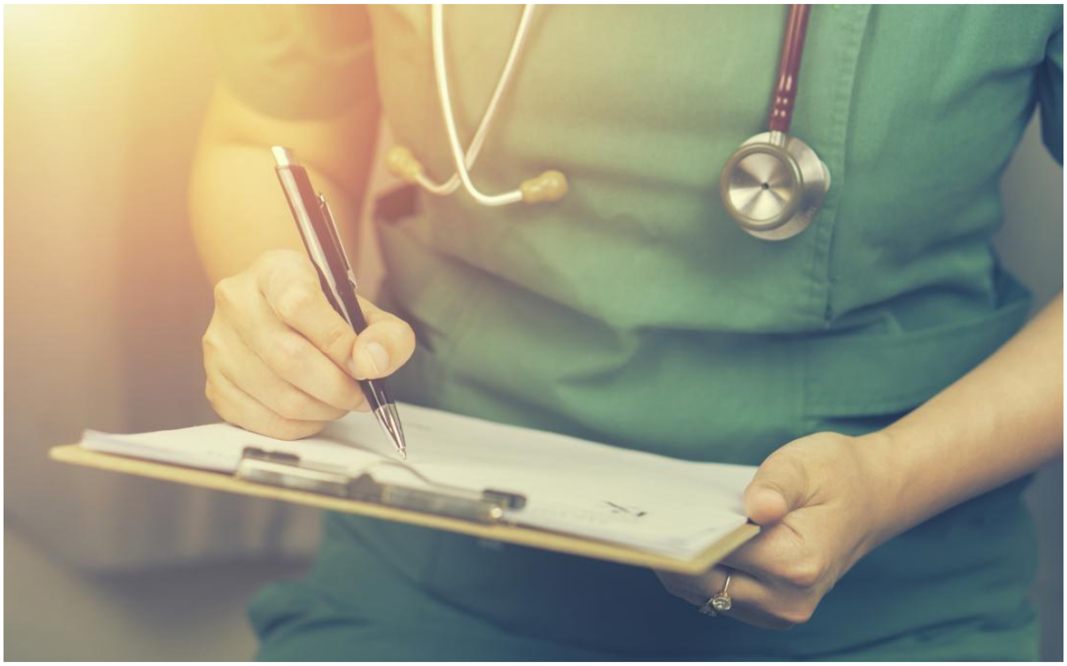
FULL BATHS **3**

HALF BATHS **1**

YEAR BUILT **2009**

Private Equity Purchases Squeeze Physician-Owned Practices

A study from OHSU and other institutions questions whether private equity ownership drives up cost without improving care.



By Christian Wihtol, The Lund Report

Private equity firms that buy physician-owned practices appear to be squeezing greater profits out of the businesses, suggests research by a group of doctors, including an assistant professor at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland.

The researchers examined 578 physician practices specializing in dermatology, gastroenterology and ophthalmology that were bought by private equity firms across the nation from 2016 to 2020.
After they were bought by private equity firms, the clinics saw more patients and billed more for visits from a large commercially insured population, according to the study published in JAMA Health Forum.

For-profit companies have long owned a big slice of the U.S. health care sector, but the growing role of private equity firms — and the steep financial returns they seek — has alarmed some researchers. The new study shifts the focus beyond hospitals and larger chains to look at doctor offices.
"The reason this is of concern to patients and policymakers is that private equity is often driven by profit margins of 20% or more," said senior author Dr. Jane Zhu, an assistant professor of medicine at OHSU. "To do that, they have to generate higher revenues or reduce costs. Increasing private equity in these physician practices may be a symptom of the continuing corporatization of health care."

"Private-equity ownership of physician practices has added a distinctly private and market-driven influence to the broader trends in corporate consolidation of physicians by health systems and insurers," the researchers concluded. "This study contributes evidence for potential overutilization and higher spending of care that will be important for policymakers to monitor."

Whether the purchase of physician practices by private equity firms has hurt or helped patient health is unclear, the researchers said.

Zhu said more information is needed about how private equity impacts practices. An OHSU news release noted that Oregon has launched a program to evaluate large proposed mergers and purchases in the health care sector to try to ensure they don't drive up health care costs or cut health care quality. While all for-profit entities seek a return, private equity firms, which don't publicly report their financial results, have been singled out as excessively profit-focused.

Under the private equity system, large investors such as pension funds or super-wealthy individuals, assign their cash to a private equity firm, which buys up profitable or promising looking businesses across a range of sectors.

Unlike publicly traded for-profit companies, private equity firms are not traded on public stock exchanges. The federal Securities & Exchange Commission regulates both publicly traded companies and private equity firms, but the rules and financial disclosure requirements the SEC imposes on publicly traded companies are far more extensive.

In Oregon, the health care sector remains largely in the hands of nonprofit entities — large nonprofit hospital and clinic systems such as Providence Health & Services, Legacy Health and PeaceHealth; and health insurers such as PacificSource, Providence and Kaiser Permanente.
But for-profit firms — including some private equity firms — play a role.

In Oregon, only two of the state's 62 general hospitals are owned by for-profit entities. One of those, Willamette Valley Medical Center in McMinnville, is owned by a private equity firm, New York City-based Apollo Global Management. The hospital is part of Apollo's LifePoint Health, a nationwide system with 265 facilities, including 62 hospitals.

Private Equity Buys In To Oregon Hospice
Earlier this summer, Oregon's new health care merger review program approved a private equity firm's purchase of two hospice facilities in the state as part of a multi-billion nationwide transaction.
The approval came despite fears voiced by three advocacy groups that the new majority owner, New York City-based private equity firm Falcon Hospice LP, might pursue cost cutting that could harm the care of patients at the Kindred Hospice facilities in Lake Oswego and Salem.

The deal met state requirements because Falcon said it will not lower the quality of care, the Oregon Health Authority said. The state said it would monitor the two facilities at intervals over a period of five years for any decline in services.

Under the deal, Falcon bought a 60% KAH Hospice, a nationwide chain of 441 hospice, community care and palliative facilities that is wholly owned by Humana, a giant, publicly traded Kentucky-based health care insurer and provider.

The Chicago-based nonprofit Private Equity Stakeholder Project urged Oregon to reject Falcon's deal, saying the entry of private-equity firms into the for-profit hospice industry would worsen the industry's problems.

Other For-Profit Expansions In Oregon
In their study, the researchers for the JAMA paper found an increase in the overall number of patients seen in the physician clinics bought by private equity firms. The study reviewed commercial insurance claims data that

showed an increased share of visits longer than 30 minutes, even though the complexity of cases remained similar to cases before acquisition.

“These billing patterns could mean more efficient documentation of services provided, or it could mean up-coding or up-charging insurance companies to make more money,” Zhu said.

The role of publicly traded for-profit companies in health care has also drawn scrutiny.

Pennsylvania-based Universal Health Services, owner of 335 behavioral health hospitals nationwide, spent years trying to win state approval to build a 100-bed psychiatric hospital in Wilsonville. Critics said the publicly traded company was seeking to serve profitable commercially insured patients while minimizing service to low-income Medicaid-insured patients, a claim UHC denied. UHC this year withdrew its application after the state approved a 50-bed facility with requirements that the hospital serve specified volumes of low-income patients. In Oregon, UHC already owns Cedar Hills Hospital, a psychiatric hospital in Portland.

But for-profit companies continue to see opportunities in health care. The nation’s largest health care insurance company, Minnesota-based UnitedHealth Group, is rapidly buying up physician practices and other medical providers. Analysts say the publicly traded company is looking for better profits to offset slackening returns on its insurance business.

In recent years UnitedHealth has bought at least two Oregon clinic networks: Oregon Medical Group in Eugene-Springfield and GreenField Health in Portland. UnitedHealth bought GreenField Health last year and Oregon Medical Group in late 2020. Combined, the two systems have about 120 doctors and other clinicians at 11 locations.

Epic, Microsoft Bring Generative AI to EHRs

BY BROCK E.W. TURNER

Epic Systems is working with Microsoft to integrate generative AI technology into its electronic health record software for the first time, the companies said Monday.

The announcement was made in conjunction with the first day of the HIMSS conference, which is being held in Chicago this week.

Health systems using Epic's EHR system will be able to run generative AI solutions through Microsoft's OpenAI Azure Service. Microsoft uses OpenAI's language model GPT-4 capabilities in its Azure cloud solution.

While Epic has worked with machine learning in the past, it's the first time it has used generative AI, said Seth Hain, senior vice president of research and development.

"There is a real potential when integrating it into workflows to increase the productivity of physicians in the exam room, folks in the back office [and] schedulers up front," Hain said

Epic and Microsoft said there were two initial AI-enabled solutions developed in the initial roll out of the integration. The first use case occurs through Epic's In Basket communication software system. Through the integration with Microsoft, clinicians can use generative AI to create a draft response when communicating asynchronously with patients.

The first customers for this use case are live on the platform now. Madison, Wisconsin-based UW Health and UC San Diego Health have already rolled out the company's AI for In-Basket responses to a limited number of users. Stanford Health Care in California is expected to add the functionality soon.

Hain said the company will roll out the software to general availability in "weeks and months" but it is not committing to a firm launch date. It expects at least one additional round of test customers.

The second use case allows providers to use generative AI to source recommendations from Epic's Slicer Dicer data visualization tool. Typically, users have to customize specific data searches on their own. With the generative AI capabilities, users can type something and the system will automatically recommend different metrics. A spokesperson said this functionality is still in development. It is expected to launch to an initial group of end users later this year.

According to Hain, Epic deployed "a couple dozen" engineers to incorporate generative AI into the company's software. The five to six month project tapped engineers in other departments once core functionality was built out. Microsoft handled the core functionality of GPT-4 algorithms, he said.

The move by Epic comes at a time when generative AI is having its moment in the sun. A rush of digital health companies are seeking to cash in on the popularity of OpenAI's ChatGPT tool, which is free for all people to use and has amassed more than 100 million users.

But experts are unsure how ChatGPT and GPT-4 will influence clinical diagnosis and decision making. Medical AI experts say the first wave of adoption will take place in areas where there are administrative redundancies. This follows Epic's line of thinking, Hain said.

"It's key that [generative AI] is done in a responsible way, with humans in the loop," Hain said. "I think that is a generally true statement, but it is critical in the context of healthcare. We're making sure that's the approach in these contexts."

Last month, Nuance Communications, a clinical documentation software company owned by Microsoft, added OpenAI's ChatGPT successor GPT-4 to its latest voice transcription application. The software, according to the company, can summarize and enter conversations between clinicians and patients directly into EHR systems using OpenAI's GPT-4 generative AI capabilities.

Hain said it was too early to determine the role of third-party software leveraging generative AI in the EHR.

"We already see organizations starting to [interoperability standards] those to build these types of integrations and applications," Hain said, "I expect there will be—as there always is—an evolution of those standards and techniques, as more and more people acclimate to generative AI."

Mango Salsa (Perfect for Fish Tacos)

thefoodiephysician.com

*This simple and delicious **mango salsa** is colorful and full of flavor! It's the perfect accompaniment to a wide variety of dishes including fish tacos and crab cakes. Make it with a handful of simple ingredients in just 20 minutes!*

You're going to love this fresh mango salsa! It's so easy to make and is packed with color and flavor. Made with fresh mangoes, onions, peppers, cilantro, and lime juice, this salsa has a perfect balance of sweet, spicy, and tangy flavors.

Mango salsa is the perfect way to dress up dishes like my easy fish tacos, Old Bay crab cakes, blackened grouper sandwiches, and air fryer quesadillas. This fresh salsa is also delicious on top of grilled chicken, salmon or pork, especially during the summer months when you may want lighter recipes. Or, just put it in a serving bowl and scoop it up with some tortilla chips!

Try this delicious mango salsa on your next Taco Tuesday and transform your fish tacos into a gourmet meal!

WHY YOU'LL LOVE THIS DISH
* Quick and easy- make it with just 7 ingredients in 15 minutes!
* Healthy- low in calories and packed with nutrients
* Can be made in advance- perfect for parties and gatherings
* Delicious- a perfect balance of sweet, spicy, and tangy flavors

DOCTOR'S TIPS:
* Not only is mango delicious, it also boasts an impressive array of nutrients!
* Mango is rich in many vitamins and minerals, especially vitamin C, which is important for boosting your immune system and promoting cell growth and repair.
* Mangoes are also rich in polyphenols, which are antioxidants that help protect your cells from damage from free radicals.

INGREDIENTS

Recipe notes and substitutions (see recipe card below for complete ingredient list and measurements):

- **Mango**- use ripe, sweet mango
- **Bell pepper**- I like to use red bell pepper but you can also use yellow or orange.
- **Red onion**- adds color and flavor
- **Jalapeño pepper**- adds just the right amount of heat; you can substitute serrano or habanero peppers for a spicier salsa
- **Fresh cilantro**- adds bright flavor; you can leave it out if you're not a fan
- **Lime juice**- use fresh lime juice to add a bit of acidity; you can substitute lemon juice
- **Salt**- salt brings out all the flavors in the salsa; taste and adjust the amount of salt as needed

Ingredients

- ☐ ▢1 ½ cups diced mango (1 large mango)
- ☐ ▢⅓ cup chopped red bell pepper
- ☐ ▢¼ cup chopped red onion
- ☐ ▢½ jalapeño pepper, chopped
- ☐ ▢2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
- ☐ ▢1 tablespoon lime juice
- ☐ ▢¼ teaspoon kosher salt

HOW TO MAKE MANGO SALSA STEP-BY-STEP

See recipe card below for full recipe amounts and instructions.

- **Step 1**- Chop the mango, bell pepper, onion, jalapeño, and cilantro and place them in a large bowl. Add a squeeze of lime juice.
- **Step 2**- Stir the salsa together and season it with salt. Taste and add more salt as needed. Let the salsa rest for at least 10-15 minutes before serving. Serve at room temperature.

CHEF'S TIPS

- Let the salsa sit at least 10-15 minutes before serving to let all the amazing flavors meld together. You can even make it a day in advance and store it in an airtight container in the fridge- the flavors are even better the next day.
- If you prefer a spicier salsa, you can leave in some of the jalapeño seeds or use a hotter pepper like a serrano or habanero.
- Be sure to use a ripe mango for the best flavor. Look for a mango that is slightly soft to the touch and has a sweet aroma.
- You can also add diced avocado to this mango salsa recipe for an extra creamy texture.

HOW TO SERVE MANGO SALSA

This fresh mango salsa is delicious for dinner on top of fish tacos or my vegan slow cooker jackfruit tacos in warm tortillas. You can add all your favorite taco toppings like sour cream, queso fresco, or a crunchy cabbage slaw.

This salsa is also the perfect accompaniment to crab cakes like my Maryland-style Old Bay crab cakes. I also like to serve this salsa with my tasty blackened grouper sandwich.

For a light and nutritious dinner, serve it on top of grilled chicken, pork tenderloin or fish like salmon, tilapia or mahi mahi.

This mango salsa is also perfect for parties because you can make it ahead of time. Serve it alongside quesadillas like my ultimate rotisserie chicken quesadillas or easy air fryer quesadillas.

Or just serve it with a bowl of tortilla chips along with other side dishes like my game day guacamole and chipotle corn salsa.

Instructions

Stir all the ingredients together in a bowl. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt as needed. Let salsa rest 10-15 minutes before serving.

Serves four.

Best Grills for 2023: Gas Grills, Griddles, Charcoal Grills and More
cnet.com

Looking to take your steak to the next level? Here are the best gas, charcoal and kamado-style grills on the market so you can upgrade your grilling game.

Grilling is a beloved pastime worldwide, and here in the US, the weather has turned and it's ready for grilling season to start in earnest. People everywhere are pulling off those old waterproof covers to see what state their grill is in. If you're one of the tens of thousands who find the old BBQ not up to the job, we have the list for you.

To help you find the grill that works best for you and your budget, we've rounded up some of the best models available right now. If you're wondering what kind of grill to get, you can check out our guide to pellet, charcoal and gas grill variants. After all, there are tons of different grill types to compare and consider, including gas grills, traditional charcoal grills, heat-loving kamado grills, infrared grills, portable grills and more.

While "the perfect grill" may not exist for everyone, many grills tick a lot of boxes. It will depend on what type of food you want to grill, so bear that in mind. Here are some ideas of the types of grills you might use.

Charcoal grill: Good for high heat and getting that perfect char

Gas grill: Great for large grills and for spur-of-the-moment outdoor cooking

Flat top grills: Perfect for smash burgers and tacos

Pellet grill: Perfect for long, slow cooks that smoke your food

Kamado grill: Great for extreme heat or heat retention

Pizza oven: Wonderful for pizza, sure, but great for other bread too

No matter what type of outdoor grill you choose, you should absolutely brush up on how to clean it (keeping that grilling surface clean with a grill brush and grill cleaner is essential in outdoor cooking) and get the best accessories for grilling. Having the right techniques and tools of the trade will complement your perfect grill, turn you into a grill master extraordinaire and make your cookouts a breeze.

Best grills

Weber Original Kettle Charcoal Grill 22-inch

Best charcoal grill

Weber's $139 original kettle grill continues to stand the test of time as the best grill for cooking with charcoal. In our high-heat searing tests, Weber delivered the best balance of seared exterior and medium rare interior steak. The Weber gave us great, crispy grilled chicken skin and flavorful ribs, too.

Simple construction means there aren't too many parts to assemble or too many features to handle while outdoor cooking. A vent on the lid controls air flow and a well-designed ash tray beneath the grill facilitates easy cleanup.

We tested the 22-inch model in black, but Weber also offers an 18-inch version of its original kettle design. There are certainly fancier and more expensive grills, but for a balance of affordability and quality, you can't go wrong if you start cooking with this classic charcoal grill.

[$139 at Ace Hardware]

Expert Grill

[Expert Grill Heavy Duty 24-Inch Charcoal Grill]

An excellent grill for a large family

When I first moved out to the High Desert in California, I knew I wanted a grill that could handle enough food for a party. I also knew that moving is expensive, so it had to be affordable. I picked this heavy-duty grill up at Walmart and was instantly impressed with how well it was constructed. After putting it all together it had heft to all the materials that made me think it would stand the test of time, and it did.

The easily removable ashtray made keeping the grill clean a breeze, and the thermometer on the top is very helpful for smoking meats, especially if you don't want to keep lifting the lid and losing the smoke! Little touches like the bottle opener and the hooks under the shelf made it even more helpful, and I used this grill for nearly 6 years before I moved again. Even when I left, the new owners took it to use with their families.
I have used a lot of really expensive grills, but this budget-friendly, sturdy workhorse is still one of my favorites.

$96 at Walmart

Traeger Flatrock

Best for tacos

While the Flatrock is pricey for a flat-top griddle, its quality and usefulness can't be overstated. Some foods just can't be cooked on a standard grill -- like tacos and smash burgers, and a flat-top griddle makes those foods a breeze. By the way, if you've never had a smash burger, you need one in your life. They're amazing.

The Flatrock uses Traeger's Pop and Lock system for accessories, so if you already have one of its grills, you can mix and match what you need. You will need to cure the Flatrock's surface, but I found it an enjoyable experience to create just the right surface for my needs. I use the Flatrock more than any other grill right now, and it is my go-to for burgers and tacos.

$900 at Traeger

Monument Grills Tabletop Propane Gas Grill

Best compact gas grill

When space is limited, finding the right grill to give you the taste you want can be hard. This gas grill from Monument is compact on the outside but surprisingly large on the inside. It's big enough to cook a spatchcocked turkey or several large steaks and, because it's a gas grill, it's ready as soon as you want to use it.
If you only have a small outdoor space or a little balcony in your condo, this would be a great addition to make your grilling dreams come true.

$169 at Amazon$170 at Target

Kamado Joe Classic III

Best kamado grill

Kamado grilling cookers, egg-shaped, ceramic, wood-burning grills that you may have seen or at least heard of, impart a delicious smoky flavor to everything they cook, and this is the best grill in the bunch. They can run low and slow for hours at smoker temperatures and sear at high heat levels that go well beyond the capabilities of gas grills. That's hot enough to create true steakhouse steaks and real wood-fired pizza like a pro griller.

With a list price of $1,999 (if you can find it in stock), the Kamado Joe Classic III may have a steep luxury grill price tag, but this high end grill delivers plenty of cooking power for the money. That means lots of grilling accessories that don't come standard with other grills, including the Big Green Egg. This kamado performs well, too. On our slow and low BBQ grill test, we adjust grills to 225 degrees F (107 C) and let go of the controls to see what happens. In this trial, the Joe demonstrated excellent temperature stability.

[$1,999 at Amazon$1,999 at Walmart$1,999 at Best Buy]

Weber Genesis II E-335

Best gas grill

This Weber grill is pricey. There's no denying that. However, if you're serious about grilling and ready to invest in your outdoor kitchen, this liquid propane gas grill is absolutely a top choice for outdoor grilling.

With 513 square inches of primary cooking grate space powered by 39,000 BTUs, plus a fold-down warming rack and a 12,000 BTU side burner, you'll never want for cooking space. Two cabinet doors hide a two-shelf storage area below the grill for utensils and supplies. And a fuel gauge lets you know how much fuel is left in your propane tank. The cast-iron grates retain even heat while cooking and are easy to clean.

The free standing Genesis II E-335 propane grill is also one of Weber's iGrill 3 compatible models, along with other Genesis II models and the Spirit II line. This $121 accessory plugs into the front of the grill and houses up to four Bluetooth temperature probes. You can monitor what's happening on this gas grill via the companion app for iOS and Android. And right now it's included for free with the purchase of this grill.

In our testing, the Genesis II E-335 turned out seared burgers with a slightly pink center, crispy chicken skin with juicy meat and fall-off-the-bone ribs. Combine that great performance with Weber's 10-year warranty on all grill parts, and your investment on this propane gas grill will have you set for years to come, even with heavy use.

$1,080 at Best Buy

How we test grills

We test different types of grills differently, but for most, we include a high heat test like searing steak or grilling burgers, a medium indirect heat test like grilling a whole chicken for more than an hour and a low and slow test with racks of ribs.

To determine what should be regarded as the best outdoor barbecue grill, we collect data like total cooking time, temperatures inside the grill and temperature inside separate pieces of meat. All that information helps us spot where grills might have hot spots or thermometer inconsistencies.

There's also a fair amount of (read: so much) blind taste testing, lively debate and voting among our editors and families, in addition to the data we gather about grilling temperatures and cooking times. You might think it would be more fun than work to eat delicious food while discussing the merits of a grill, and you'd be right.

WE NEED MORE PEOPLE LIKE THIS

A man wanting to jump off a bridge in London was talked down by absolute strangers who proceeded to hold him for an hour until help arrived to get him down safely. Look at that grip. Look at the care, compassion, selflessness, and determination shown by complete strangers to a hurting human being.

We need more of this in the world.

Best Memorial Day Weekend Getaways

By VacationIdea.com

Most of us can't wait until Memorial Day weekend at end of May because it marks the start of summer. Whether your idea of a dream vacation is relaxing on a beach by the sea or mountain biking through a national park, longer days and warm weather make it easy to have fun outdoors.

We recommend that you call the attractions and restaurants ahead of your visit to confirm current opening times.

Utah - Desert Pearl Inn

Commanding a spectacular location on the banks of the Virgin River at the entrance to the famous Zion National Park in Springdale, Desert Pearl Inn is a luxurious haven in the western desert that promises an unforgettable getaway. You will be surrounded by the spectacular scenery of sun-drenched cliffs, manicured lawns and Navajo Sandstone. Relax in the freeform outdoor swimming pool and hot tub to the sounds of a nearby waterfall, or stroll through the tranquil gardens in search of butterflies and birds. Impressively large rooms and suites offer sophisticated style and are beautifully furnished with natural materials that blend with the surrounding landscape. Guest accommodations offer the convenience of fully equipped kitchens, individual climate control, wireless Internet and breathtaking views. Start the morning with gourmet coffee and freshly baked muffins from the Periodic Table. Lunch and dinner is served at the Highway Restaurant, where you can dine on gourmet locally-inspired dishes.

707 Zion Park Blvd., Springdale, UT 84767, Phone: 435-772-8888

Wisconsin - Camp Wandawega

With a rich history that dates back to 1925, Camp Wandawega is a unique guest camp on the shores of Lake Wandawega in Wisconsin. The property offers a rustic camp experience and a true escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Choose from a variety of accommodation, ranging from vintage cabins, bunkhouses and bungalows to treehouses, teepees and tents, all of which are simply furnished with the bare essentials, inviting you to let go and re-connect with nature. There is a private beach, fishing pier, boating, canoeing, biking, fishing, hiking, tennis and shuffleboard. Outdoor grills and barbeques are available around the resort for cookouts under the stars.

W5453 Lake View Dr, Elkhorn, WI 53121

South Carolina - Montage Palmetto Bluff

Montage Palmetto Bluff is a luxury getaway with suites, cottages and homes surrounded by forest and water views. Amenities include verandahs with gorgeous views, fireplaces, and high ceilings. Spa Montage Palmetto Bluff relies on natural inspiration to help guests relax, offering a range of body therapies, massages and facials.

Palmetto Bluff is set on over 20,000 acres which you can explore by bike on the 32 miles of waterfront. There resort provides access to the Palmetto Bluff Shooting Club, May River Golf Course, Wilson Lawn and Racquet Club, and Longfield Stables. Throughout the community, you will get to admire a wide range of sculptures and seasonal community art shows. In addition to optional in-room dining, guests can enjoy seasonally-inspired cuisine made with native ingredients and a reverence for the Southern classics at The Carolina Room. The Canoe Club provides beautiful views and features southern comfort dining, with emphasis on seafood, while Buffalo’s, set within Wilson Village, offers casual southern cuisine.

476 Mount Pelia Road, Bluffton, SC 29910, Phone: 843-706-6500

Idaho - The Wallace Inn

Nestled at the foot of the towering Bitterroot Mountains, the newly renovated Wallace Inn is a contemporary mountain retreat in the heart of North Idaho’s spectacular Silver Valley. Surrounded by breath-taking natural beauty, dense forested slopes, and endless blue skies, this modern hotel is the perfect place to recharge over a long weekend.

Fifty-nine well-appointed guest rooms and four luxurious suites are spacious and bright, with modern décor and an array of deluxe amenities, including individual climate control, cable TV, and an in-room coffee service. All rooms have beautiful mountain views and there is complimentary wireless Internet throughout the hotel. The indoor pool has a skylight through which you can enjoy the view while going for a swim. Facilities include a sauna, steam room and a fitness room. Molly's at the Inn serves delicious farm-fresh fare throughout the day in a sunny setting, where cozy booths and lovely mountain views add a special touch to your meal. The quiet ambiance of O'Rourke's Lounge is ideal for relaxing over a nightcap and chatting with fellow guests.

100 Front Street, Wallace, ID 83873, Phone: 208-752-1252

North Carolina - WhiteGate Inn & Cottage

Exuding a wonderful historic charm that is echoed in the surrounding town of Asheville, WhiteGate Inn & Cottage is an award-winning bed and breakfast that offers a romantic escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. Eleven beautifully appointed rooms and suites are individually decorated with rich, luxurious furnishings, modern amenities, and offer wonderful garden views. Named after famous poets, each room boasts volumes of poetry by the same author and lavish bathrooms with whirlpool tubs. Cozy fireplaces set into stone walls create warm and welcoming ambiance and separate entrances to some of the guest rooms add an element of privacy. Pampering spa and salon treatments are available in the comfort of your suite, where you can relax under the expert touch of a trained masseuse, as well as a fully equipped exercise room where you can work out. Curl up next to the fire in the parlor against a backdrop of live piano music or relax in the solarium and soak up the beautiful views. Stroll through the award-winning gardens, which are home to an extensive collection of unique flora.

173 E. Chestnut Street, Asheville, NC 28801, Phone: 800-485-3045

Sausalito - Casa Madrona

Casa Madrona is one of San Francisco's timeless and beloved icons with a 125 history. Perched on a hillside overlooking the bay in the charming town of Sausalito, this luxurious boutique hotel seamlessly blends style and innovation to offer a luxurious escape. Unparalleled grandeur is reflected in Casa Madrona's signature 11-roomed residence, The Mansion. Built in 1885, the exquisite Victorian estate has been redesigned to create a private, ethereal ambiance with spectacular panoramic views. The hotel also offers apartment-style accommodation in the Hillside Suites, complete with modern amenities and overlooking Richardson Bay. Welcoming hospitality and outstanding service greets you on arrival at this luxurious hotel. Guests have access to a private spa and steam room, a swimming pool and a range of services including daily newspapers, porter assistance, and 24-hour room service. Classic Italian fare is served at Poggio Trattoria next door to the hotel.

801 Bridgeway, Sausalito, CA 94965, Phone: 800-288-0502

Vermont - The Wildflower Inn

Overlooking rolling green hills, tree-lined pastures and breathtaking Vermont farm country, the Wildflower Inn is a glorious sanctuary in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. Once a 100-cow dairy farm, the Wildflower Inn has been lovingly transformed into a quaint, village-like setting with renovated carriage barns, country collectibles, and wonderful countryside views. Twenty-four comfortable guest rooms and suites have been decorated to provide a peaceful countryside ambiance. Rooms do not have televisions; however, there is wireless Internet throughout the retreat. A hearty farmhouse breakfast is served every morning and afternoon snacks are available in the lounge where you can relax in style. The surrounding Northeast Kingdom is a veritable outdoor adventure heaven with a plethora of activities to enjoy year-round, from hiking, mountain biking, swimming and fishing to cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and sledding. After a busy day outdoors, re-energize with pampering treatments from the Stepping Stone Spa.

2059 Darling Hill Road, Lyndonville, VT 05851, Phone: 802-626-8310

Georgia - W Atlanta – Buckhead

W Atlanta - Buckhead offers the perfect place for visitors to rest while enjoying fine entertainment, dining, or shopping in the city, all from a convenient location. This hotel offers five different types of rooms: Wonderful Room, Spectacular Room, Fabulous Room, Wow Suite, and E-Wow Suite. Each provides luxurious pillow top mattresses, 350-thread-count sheets, BlissSpa products in the room, an iPod docking station, complete media library, Munchie Box, and a work area. Within the hotel, you will find a spa, which guests are able to access for free as well as the FIT 24/7 fitness center with top-of-the-line equipment for all athletes, ranging from ellipticals and treadmills to free weights and weight machines. The Living Room is open to hotel guests – it’s an excellent place to hang out, read one of the many books, play a board game, and listen to music. Cook Hall serves handcrafted cocktails and beer poured from the vintage taps. You can create a custom drink, share platters or order individually-portioned snacks. Whiskey Blue Atlanta serves lighter fare and signature cocktails. Its hip atmosphere, cutting-edge design, and rooftop location with its own terrace make it a unique experience.

188 14th Street, NE Atlanta, GA 30361, Phone: 404-892-6000

The Gasparilla Inn and Club

The Gasparilla Inn and Club is an elegant, historic golf resort located on Gasparilla Island, about 53 miles from Sarasota. Stately and ornate and built in 1913, this classic upscale resort is a reminder of the “Old Florida” of more elegant times. The resort’s 142 luxury suites and rooms are decorated with vintage pieces, brightly colored and comfortable, and equipped with all modern amenities. Villas and cottages have screened porches, living areas, and kitchenettes. The guests can enjoy the beach club, private golf club, several tennis courts, a gym, and a spa. There is also a croquet lawn, a bakery, a marina, and an upscale gourmet restaurant called Pink Elephant.

500 Palm Ave, Boca Grande, FL 33921, Phone: 941-964-4500

Colorado - Leroux Creek Inn & Vineyards

Surrounded by rolling green vineyards and fruit-laden orchards with breath-taking views of the West Elk mountains, Canyons and Mesas, Le Roux Creek Inn is a beautiful bed and breakfast tucked away in the heart of Colorado's North Fork Valley. Five tastefully decorated rooms are comfortably furnished with king or queen sized beds, private bathrooms, and bespoke amenities for pure home-away-from-home comfort. Mountain, desert or vineyards views can be enjoyed from each room and a guest refrigerator with complimentary beverages is available. A secluded hot tub promises romantic evenings under the stars, while the spacious deck overlooking landscaped gardens is the perfect breakfast spot. Spend days exploring the vineyards, tasting wine and hiking or biking along the numerous trails in the area. In the evening, sit back and relax by the roaring fire with a glass of a local wine.

12388 3100 Road, Hotchkiss, CO 81419, Phone: 970-872-4746

EAST COAST

The Sagamore in the Adirondack Mountains is planning a Chowderfest where you can learn how to make great chowder and eat it too. On Sunday, the hotel is going to host a regatta. .If you are looking for a romantic trip, the Mirror Lake Inn has a 3-day package. You'll be able to relax and rejuvenate in a natural setting overlooking a lake.

WEST COAST

Want to get in shape for the upcoming beach season? At La Costa resort in California, you can play golf, relax at the spa, or participate in over 50 daily fitness classes. Click here for more weight loss retreats. Visit the scenic Snoqualmie Falls 30 miles from Seattle, get pampered at the spa and dine in style at the Salish Lodge and Spa.

San Ysidro Ranch is a secluded hideaway in Southern California. Shutters on the Beach is set on a sandy beach overlooking the ocean. Relax next to the outdoor pool and with a massage at the spa. Rancho Valencia is a relaxing resort in Rancho Santa Fe, California. Treatments utilize fresh ingredients, pure essential oils, and healing benefits from the sea to relax and rejuvenate. Choose from facials, body therapy, skin care treatments and couples treatments. In addition to the spa, the resort offers tennis, golf and other activities. Guests are accommodated in 49 spacious suites set on 20 landscaped acres. Hyatt Regency Monterey features championship golf and a new 12,000 square foot spa. Dine at the scenic Penthouse restaurant at The Huntley Hotel overlooking the ocean.

THE CARIBBEAN

Since the Memorial Day weekend signals the start of the summer, if you want to head straight to the sandy shore, check out one of the packages at The Meridian Club. You can learn to scuba dive, or just relax in the sun. Sandy Lane Resort in Barbados is just a 4.5-hour flight from New York City. The resort has a spa, golf and a variety of watersports.

HAWAII

Although airfare prices to Hawaii tend to be steep, there is no better way to greet the summer than with a surfing lesson in Waikiki. Fly to Honolulu and stay at one of the hotels right on the water.

MONTANA

Paws Up in Montana offers a wilderness vacation with a luxury twist. Guests can explore 37,000 acres of wilderness by day and return to their luxury home or tent at night. With an average of 422 acres per guest, you can spend your days wildlife watching, hiking, mountain biking and fly fishing surrounded by nature. Guests are accommodated in luxury tents for two with feather beds, electricity, bathrooms with hot water and original art on the walls. And to help ensure that you will not have to rough it, the 'Canvas Concierge' stands by to help you start a fire as well as answer any other requests. Ask about the historic Morris Farm House. Located on the bank of Elk Creek, the farmhouse offers privacy and seclusion.

SAN JUAN ISLAND

Views of the San Juan Channel, a fireplace and an oversized whirl-bath jetted tub are standard in all of the twenty guest rooms at Friday Harbor House. This small inn is located on a prominent bluff in the quaint town of Friday Harbor on San Juan Island. Eat at the harbor view dining room and enjoy a meal of farm-fresh produce and herbs from the inn's garden. If you plan your trip in the quiet season from October through June 15th and you will enjoy a totally different getaway. The room rates are much lower and the island, although chilly, will be much less crowded.

THE BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS

The Grove Park Inn is a place for anyone looking to relax, play some golf, and a enjoy a wide range of spa treatments. Stay in room with a view of the Blue Ridge Mountains and eat at the Dining Room. If your going to play golf, you might be interested in knowing that all of the golf carts are equipped with a GPS system that will tell you how far your ball is from the hole, the front of the green, and the back of the green.

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