

MD Life

February 2025



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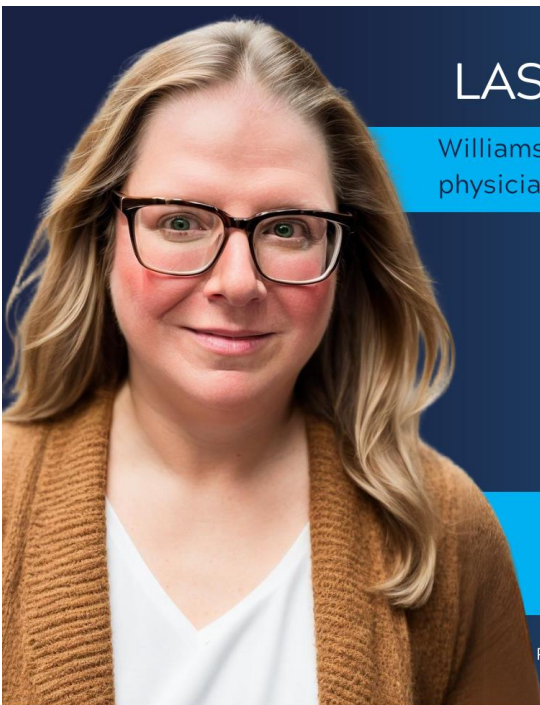


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The Emotional Toll of a Broken Health Care System

Robert Pearl, MD

As a physician and health care leader, I initially declined to comment on the killing of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson. I felt that speculating about the shooter's intent would only sensationalize a terrible act.

Regardless of the circumstances, vigilante violence has no place in a free and just society.

But now, more than a month later, I feel compelled to address one aspect of the story that has been widely misunderstood: the public's reaction to the news of Thompson's murder. Specifically, why tens of thousands of individuals "liked" and "laughed" at a post on Facebook announcing the CEO's death.



What causes someone to "like" murder?

News analysts have attributed the social media response to America's "simmering anger" and "frustration" with a broken health care system, pointing to rising medical costs, insurance red tape, and time-consuming prior authorization requirements as justifications.

These are all, indeed, problems and may explain some of the public's reaction. Yet these descriptions grossly understate the lived reality for most of those affected. When I speak with individuals who have lost a child, parent, or spouse because of what they perceive as an unresponsive and uncaring system, their pain is raw, intense. What they feel isn't frustration—it's agony.

By framing health care's failures in terms of statistical measures and policy snafus, we reduce a deeply personal crisis to an intellectual exercise. And it's this very detached, cognitive approach that has allowed our nation to disregard the emotional devastation endured by millions of patients and their families.

When journalists, health care leaders, and policymakers cite eye-popping statistics on health care expenditures, highlight exorbitant insurer profits, or deride the bloated salaries of executives, they leave out a vital part of the story. They omit the unbearable human suffering behind the numbers. And I fear that until we approach health care as a moral crisis—not merely an economic or political puzzle to solve—our nation will never act with the urgency required to relieve people's profound pain.

A pain beyond reason

In Dante's *Inferno*, hell is a place where suffering is eternal and the cries of the damned go unheard. For countless Americans who feel trapped in our health care system, that metaphor rings true. Their anguish and pleas for mercy are met with silence.

It is this sense of abandonment and powerlessness, not mere frustration, that fuels both a desperate rage and an anger at a system and its leaders who appear not to care. The response isn't one of glee—it's a visceral reaction born of pain and unrelenting remorse.

As a clinician, I've seen life-destroying pain in my patients—and even within my own family. When my cousin Alan died in his twenties from a then-incurable cancer, my aunt and uncle were powerless to save him. Their

grief was profound, unrelenting, and eternal. They never recovered from the loss. But Alan's death, heartbreaking as it was, stemmed from the limits of science at the time.

What millions of Americans endure today is different. Their loved ones die not because cures don't exist but because the health care system treats them like a number. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, profit-driven delays, and systemic indifference produce avoidable tragedies.

To appreciate this depth of pain, imagine standing behind a chain-link fence, watching someone you love being tortured. You scream and plead for help, but no one listens. That is what health care feels like for too many Americans. And until all of us acknowledge and feel their pain, little will improve.

Curing America's indifference

When we focus solely on cold numbers—the millions who've lost Medicaid coverage, the hundreds of thousands of avoidable deaths each year, or the life-expectancy gap between the U.S. and other nations—we strip health care of its humanity.

But once we stop framing these failures as bureaucratic inefficiencies or frustrations and, instead, focus on the devastation of having to watch a loved one suffer and die needlessly, we are forced to confront a moral imperative. Either we must act with urgency and resolve the problem or admit we simply don't care.

In the halls of Congress, lawmakers continue to weigh modest reforms to prior authorization requirements and Medicaid spending—baby steps that won't fix a system in crisis. The truth is that without bold, transformative action, health care will remain unaffordable and inaccessible for millions of families whose anguish will grow. Here are three examples of the scale of transformation required:

- Reverse the obesity epidemic with a two-part strategy. Congress will need to tax ultra-processed, sugary foods that drive hundreds of billions of dollars in health care costs each year. In parallel, lawmakers should cap the manufacturer-set price of weight-loss medications like Ozempic and Wegovy to be no higher than in peer nations.
- Change clinician payments from volume to value. Current fee-for-service payment systems incentivize unnecessary tests, treatments, and procedures rather than better health outcomes. Transitioning to pay-for-value would reward health care providers, and specifically primary care physicians, who successfully prevent chronic diseases, better manage existing conditions, and reduce complications such as heart attacks, strokes, and kidney failure.
- Empower patients and save lives with generative AI. Tools like ChatGPT can help reduce the staggering 400,000 annual deaths from misdiagnoses and 250,000 more from preventable medical errors. By integrating AI into health care, we can enable at-home care, continuous disease monitoring, and personalized treatment, making medical care safer, more accessible, and more efficient.

If elected officials, payers, and regulators fail to act, they will have chosen to perpetuate the unbearable pain and suffering patients and families endure daily. They need to hear the cries of people. The time for transformative action is now.

Robert Pearl is a plastic surgeon and author of ChatGPT, MD: How AI-Empowered Patients & Doctors Can Take Back Control of American Medicine and Uncaring: How the Culture of Medicine Kills Doctors and Patients. He can be reached on Twitter @RobertPearlMD.

Sky-High Car Insurance Rates? Blame It on All the Tech in Our Cars

By Kim Komando



My car insurance just went up 32%. Did I have an accident or get a few tickets? Nope. Across the U.S., the average full-coverage car insurance bill went up 25% last year. In some states, it was closer to 40%. Geez.

The main reason? Today's high-tech vehicles cost way more to repair. You don't need to own a high-tech car to feel the pinch, though; it's hitting everyone.

Driving up costs

Modern cars are packed with dozens of sensors and endless lines of computer code. Combine that with the rising cost of replacement parts and repairs, and voila — soaring auto insurance rates.

No wonder the average collision insurance claim jumped 64% between 2018 and 2022. In 2023, auto insurance rates climbed 20%, the biggest increase since 1976.

The rate increases are slowing a bit, but there's no telling how tariffs could impact that. About 60% of car parts used in repairs are imported from China.

Let's look under the hood

In 2018, Toyota redesigned its uber-popular Camry. The number of parts in the front bumper alone increased from 18 to 43. Most are related to advanced driver-assist features.

The upgrades also mean a front-end collision repair is 43% more expensive. It's not just driver-assist jacking up costs.

- Many new cars have LED headlights, which cost around five times more than halogen lights to replace.
- New cars contain more aluminum. Compared to steel, aluminum is lighter, provides better gas mileage and offers more protection in a crash, but it's harder to fix and more expensive.

- EVs take 20 days on average to repair. That's 40% longer than traditional vehicles and \$500 more expensive for labor.

Smart ways to save

I make it my business to find the best ways to save. Then, I pass them along to you. Let's do this.

- Review your current insurance plan and **make adjustments** to your coverage levels. Raising your deductible could result in a significant decrease in your premium. Keep in mind you'll pay more out of pocket if you get into an accident.
- Ask for **discounts**. You might get one if your car has an antitheft system installed, you're a safe (accident-free) driver or you've completed defensive driving courses. Talk to your agent.
- Consider switching to **usage-based insurance**. If you don't drive that much or have a relatively short commute, you could pay much less than you would under a traditional plan.
- **Bundle** your other insurance plans with the same provider. Carrying home, auto, life and even pet insurance under one company means better rates.

The million-dollar question

"Should I install one of those trackers to get a discount?" I wrote [all about what they collect here](#).

In a nutshell: For me, the discount isn't worth it. Review your plan, talk to your agent, and see how much you'll really save by letting them know everywhere you go ... and every time you hit the gas or slam on the brakes. You know they'll use and sell the data in so many ways.



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- **Proven Tax Strategy Successes:** Our most recent assessment found \$234k – \$975k in tax savings for our clients.

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Tax Preparation Planning for Physicians: What You Need to File Your Taxes Correctly!

With tax season quickly approaching, many of us are dreading collecting (let alone finding) our appropriate tax forms and documents. In addition, the start of the New Year can be very stressful and challenging for physicians. This is because illnesses and the flu season begin to ramp up, and staffing shortages can become more prevalent during this time.

It is critically important that physicians have a stress-free plan for ensuring that they have all the important tax documentation needed to accurately complete their taxes. If working with a tax professional, having a tax return preparation guide (like the one below) can help facilitate this. From various tax documents to important tax form release dates, the guide below should help ensure a less stressful way for physicians to file their taxes.



General Information Needed for Tax Preparation

Physicians will need to collect some basic information to get started on filing their taxes. For those physicians working with a CPA or other tax professionals, the following general information will be needed:

- Proper Identification (Copy of driver's license, Social Security Numbers, names and dates of birth for you, spouse, children/dependents, and address)
- Prior Year Tax Return
- Banking Information (direct deposit for refunds/tax payments)

It is very important that your tax professional receives your prior years' tax return. Your most recent tax return contains critical information – such as any carry forward losses that can be used to offset this year's taxes, or the amount of estimated taxes you had already paid. The last thing you want to do is find yourself in a situation where you are paying more in taxes than you need to, or even worse, not paying enough in taxes.

Once you have your basic information together, there are four main areas to gather tax documentation for:

1. Sources of Income
2. Deductions
3. Credits
4. Other (i.e., Gifts made, Qualified Charitable Distributions "QCDs", etc.)

For academic physicians who are employed as an employee for a university hospital, those physicians will need to collect their W-2 form. Independent contracting physicians will need to collect their various 1099 forms along with all of their income and expenses. Business expenses include, but are not limited to: office rent, continuing medical education costs, malpractice insurance, technology and software, mileage, and payroll records.

Unlike academic physicians who have taxes withheld from their income, 1099 physicians receive their gross pay as defined through their contract. The most common form this will be reflected on is the Form 1099-NEC ("non-employee income") or Form 1099-MISC. Additionally, if you receive income from a partnership or corporation, you will receive a K-1.

Retirement and Taxable Investment Account Tax Forms

If you maintain investment accounts outside of your qualified retirement plans, these are commonly referred to as taxable accounts or brokerage accounts. This is because the interest, dividends, and capital gains from the sale of positions, are generally fully taxable in the year earned. As a result, you may receive some of the following 1099s:

- 1099-DIV (dividends sourced from a taxable account)
- 1099-INT (interest received on money market, checking accounts, savings accounts)
- 1099-B (typically capital gains for positions held greater than 1 year and capital losses)
- 1099-R (distributions from pensions, annuities, and IRAs)
- SSA-1099 (social security payments)

“The IRS deadline to receive your 1099-R form is January 31.”

Remember that corrected 1099s may need to be distributed. If so, they can be released after the January 31st date. Make sure you verify your cost basis and holding period details for any investment sales to ensure accuracy. It is not uncommon to expect to receive 1099-DIV, 1099-INT, and 1099-B forms in mid-late February.

Physicians that implement **Roth conversions** (transfers from a traditional IRA to a Roth IRA) or a **back-door roth conversion** (transfer from a non-deductible IRA to a Roth IRA) will also receive a 1099-R. Depending upon if there is after-tax basis in the traditional IRA, there may be other forms that need to be maintained or reported for tax purposes. Your tax preparer should be informed of any after-tax basis, rollovers made, and insurance policy exchanges.

Deductions

The academic physician who makes pre-tax contributions to a 401(k), 403(b), or 457(b) plan, will have those contributions automatically reduce their gross income as reflected on their W-2 form (an amount equal to pre-tax contributions will be excluded from income). Documentation should be gathered if contributions were made to traditional or Roth IRAs. If contributions made were more than allowable limits, these need to be corrected prior to the filing deadline in 2025. Health Savings Accounts (“HSAs”) should be included in this list with Form 5498-SA. Any deposit and withdrawal records should be kept ensuring compliance with HSA record keeping rules.

Physicians in private practice who contribute to a Solo 401(k) or Defined Benefit Plan may be able to deduct contributions. The following may also be deductible:

- Health insurance premiums
- Long-term care premiums may be able to offset business income
- If your practice is a pass-through business, you could be eligible for the full 20% **Qualified Business Income (QBI) deduction if your income is less than \$191,950 for single filers, and \$383,900 for joint filers** (QBI can also be claimed from rental income if you own your own building from where you practice)

Did you pay interest on a HELOC, mortgage, or home equity loan? If so, you will receive Form 1098. If you paid points that should be documented as well to claim as deductions. If you contributed to public charities and itemized your deductions, up to 60% of your adjusted gross income can be deducted. If you don't meet the threshold for itemized deductions, you could consider bunching two years' worth of charitable

contributions into a single year by taking advantage of a Donor Assisted Fund (DAF). This allows you to take the deduction now and contribute to the charities from the DAF on an annual basis.

“You could generate deductions on your vacation home if a few IRS rules are followed. You need to rent the house for more than 14 days in the year and cannot use the place for more than 14 days or more than 10% of days rented, whichever is greater.”

So, for example, if you rented the vacation home for 9 months, you could use the home for 18 days to qualify for rental income deductions.

Credits

Did you purchase an electric vehicle or make an energy efficient home improvement? These could be opportunities for tax credits. Collect and keep all the documentation together.

Don't forget to gather documentation for advance payments, if any, toward the 2024 tax return - estimated tax payments, applying tax overpayment for prior year toward the 2024 tax payment.

Other

If you are already required to take Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from your qualified accounts, **Qualified Charitable Distributions are one of the most effective tools to reduce your tax liability** – up to \$105,000 can be removed from taxable income in 2024. If you took advantage of this last year, make sure that your QCD amount is not mistakenly reported as taxable since it will appear as a taxable distribution on Form 1099-R. The 1099-R will not code your QCD as tax free and the onus is on you to report the QCD tax-free amount to your tax preparer.

Gifts to children and family are exempt up to \$18,000 in 2024. Any amount above this is still not taxable but will be deducted from your lifetime estate tax exemption amount and requires you to file Form 709.

In summary, there are many tax forms that physicians need to pay close attention to. It is important to work with a team of advisors who incorporate lifetime tax bill reduction strategies, alongside your tax preparation professionals. If you would like to receive a more comprehensive tax form checklist to help you prepare your taxes for this tax season, please email Barbara Freeborn at bfreeborn@wealthenhancement.com – she would be happy to forward it.

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The 10 Best Wines You've Probably Never Heard of

By Vlad Craciun, luxatic.com



As with everything in life, it's easy to fall for only the things everyone talks about and thinks they're the best. It's the same with everything, including wines. Ask someone about good wines and all they'll tell you is classics like cabernet, pinot, and chardonnay. Everyone knows they're good and almost nobody is willing to break the routine and try something else.

But that doesn't mean you shouldn't look deeper and dig your nose into some special wine names nobody has heard of. Who knows what amazing wine you'll discover? Sure, with thousands and thousands of wineries in the world, it's not an easy start, so we've made the first step. We started looking for some obscure wines made from little known grapes and we came up with interesting findings.

If you're willing to sacrifice what you know about wines and try something new, different tastes and flavors, go ahead and take a look on our list of the 10 best wines you've probably never heard of. You might find your next best wine.

10. Pecorino

Pecorino is an Italian type of grape from Abruzzo abandoned in favor of other grape varieties which



produce bigger grape yields. But two winemakers decided to resurrect it and transformed it into one of Italy's wine success stories of the 21st century.

After Pecorino's revival, everyone wants to grow it. The wine obtained from these grapes has a crisp fruity taste which resembles that of a sauvignon blanc. The 2016 Tiberius Pecorino, of which you can find a bottle for \$20, is complex, bright and juicy and features lemongrass and fresh fruit flavors while it also adds a nice saltiness and a rich round texture.

9. Primitivo/Zinfandel

The Zinfandel was introduced in California during the Gold Rush and quickly became the most planted vine. The climate and soils aided its growth and the vine flourished. The same vine is called Primitivo in Italy and grows in the Puglia region in the southern part of the country.

The Zinfandel produces bold dark purple grapes and an inky and tannic red wine with a flavor rich in berries and peppery bite. The Primitivo gives out a lighter version of the Californian Zinfandel and gets more of the flavor of the grapes.

8. Spartico

Spartico is a USDA certified organic wine, free of sulfites and pesticides and you can find it at Whole Foods for only \$11 a bottle. The wine blends half tempranillo and half cabernet and has a light and subtle sweet flavor, with hints of cherries and strawberries.

Affordable and light, the Spartico fits in perfectly with cheese, Spanish tapas, paella, or some other spicy dishes.

7. Gringet

Gringet is a type of grape which comes from the mountainous regions of eastern France. It's another variety which was saved from extinction thanks to Dominique Belluard. With his vineyards at the foot of Mont Blanc, he's getting a lot of attention for the alpine grape varieties.

One of the must try Gringet wines produced there is the 2015 Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Les Alpes, which comes at only \$42 a bottle. The wine is delicate and boasts a floral scent, with an elegant and luscious bright white.



6. Bandol



Taking advantage of the position in the southeastern hills of France and the influences of the Mediterranean Sea, Bandol produces some great and recognized wines. It's the Mouvèdre plantings, with their spicy, tannic red wines which boast flavors of licorice and dark berries and then there are the rosés, also made from Grenache, Cinsault, and other local grapes. The latter come with a superb freshness which reminds of Provence and the earthy and herbaceous hints ich add to the structure of the wine.

5. Vynecrest Cherry Divyne

Coming from Pennsylvania, the Vynecrest Cherry Divyne is not even close to what you might expect. Try as much as you'd like, but you'll never guess that this wine is actually made from cherries. Yes, a dessert wine made from Montmorency sour cherries from a Pennsylvanian orchard.

The Vynecrest Cherry Divyne boasts a brilliant red with a sweet tart-like flavor. And if paired with chocolate mousse, vanilla ice cream or poached pears, it'll make for the perfect sweet treat.



4. Ruché



Ruché is a wine made from the Piedmontese grape which was saved by a parish priest who cultivated it in the town of Castagnole Monferrato. Following that, the local vineyard prices went up and everybody got crazy on the Piedmontese variety and the Ruché wines.

Out of these light to medium bodied wines, you should definitely try the 2016 Crivelli Ruché di Castagnole Monferrato. You'll find it for around \$24 a bottle, but it will amaze you with its flavors of spices and fruits, with hints of roses and lavender. The wine's lush-red texture is nonetheless impressive.

3. Frappato/Nerello Mascalese

Sicily and its volcanic soils near Mount Etna has given birth to an amazing variety of wines. One that stands apart is the Nerello Mascalese, a rustic Italian wine thought to offspring from the Sangiovese grape. When combined with the Frappato from the southeastern coastline of Sicily, it will give away fresher fruit and floral notes.

Try a Frappato or Nerello Mascalese with some pasta or pizza and you're in for an amazing dinner. These two wines, separate or blended together, fit perfectly with hearty Italian meals, and especially with a lot of salty cheeses.



2. The Prisoner



From The Prisoner Wine Company comes one of California's most coveted and mysterious wines. Released every October 31st and dubbed The Prisoner, this wine comes from a combination of zinfandel, cabernet sauvignon, syrah, petite syrah and charbono. It's inspired by the 'mixed blacks' made by the Italian immigrants who once settled in the Napa Valley region.

The Prisoner boasts wonderful aromas of cherry, espresso and roasted fig and fits perfectly with a steak or your usual fall and winter wine drinking.

1. VORS Sherry

With its story going back thousands of years, in the times of Phoenicians who settled in Spain's Jerez region somewhere around 1110 BC, Sherry is a wine that has always been appreciated. The thing is it's more like a spirit – or a fortified wine – and drinks like one, fitting in wonderfully after a good dinner.

Out of the many Sherry wines around, such as the Fino or Oloroso coming from southern Spain, one stands out more. The VORS – Vinum Optimum Rare Signatum (Very Old Rare Sherry), is a wine aged for at least 30 years before it's released. That gives it a wonderful complexity with a nutty palate and delicious notes of citrus and dried fruits.





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Mortgage

How Doctors Lost Their Freedom and What It Means for Health Care Today

Allan Dobzyniak, MD



It is presently fair to ask the question, do doctors participate in our society as individuals being free? If this is no longer the case, why and what are the consequences? If a doctor is employed, he answers to an employer. If there is participation with Medicaid and Medicare, the rules must be followed. These are rules, mandates, and regulations created by the administrative state, politicians, and faceless bureaucrats. If there is participation with an insurance company, compliance with the contractual relationship is mandatory. Why would physicians allow themselves these masters in what are easily described as tyrannical relationships?

Doctors have allowed themselves to be characterized as untrustworthy, even devoid of virtue, by those who covet power over them. The title of doctor has even been replaced by provider. Such an immoral group of individuals needs the iron hand of government, its egocentric politicians, and power-hungry bureaucrats to control their inherent duplicity by allowing them only the appropriate freedoms to practice their profession. Of course, allowed freedom is not freedom. It is just the opposite. Certificate of Need laws, non-compete clauses, mandated use of the electronic medical record, and Stark Laws are clear examples of laws specifically designed to restrict doctors' freedoms. The created perception that physicians are motivated by their own self-interests and not the interests and needs of patients, so the argument goes, allows such restrictions on freedom to be defended.

Why have doctors allowed this to happen? It is difficult to conclude but unavoidable. Doctors are so risk-averse that they would choose to surrender freedom and be taken care of by their paymasters rather than engage in the unique freedom opportunities that our society still offers, albeit to ever lesser degrees.

Unfortunately, when physician finances are controlled by others, these others also control the physicians. There seems to be more comfort in this progressive loss of freedom and an actual affinity for what was once described as slavery.

Edmund Burke stated "There is no liberty without morality." What is tragic is that it is actually the immorality of government that has allowed physicians to be falsely characterized as immoral, or at least not deserving of trust, and hence in need of being controlled. So, freedom has been taken away by the creation of a duplicitous narrative and engaged by a profession that would rather be taken care of as opposed to maintaining independence and freedom.

There is an interesting historical story that might be studied. The Bolshevik Russian Revolution took place in 1917. Of course, the equality of circumstances would now prevent "people from dying in the streets," a familiar refrain from the political left. It was the utopian dream that the government could supply medical care more fairly and cheaper than a "greedy" market-oriented system. In a consumer-oriented medical business, the former cottage industry, doctors' success was dependent upon their professionalism, which included the provision of care to the poor and their reputation. Doctors were able to earn a comfortable living and could provide charity care to the needy poor. Patients choose their doctors. Implying that physicians' professionalism was a fantasy and relegating all physicians to the same reputational status needed to be and was accomplished. The great Russian author Solzhenitsyn, in his novel *Cancer Ward*, imagines a vision of health care, the essence of which is the consensual relationship between the patient and physician. In Mr. Solzhenitsyn's words, "Among all these persecutions [of the old doctor], the most persistent and stringent had been directed against the fact that Doctor Oreschenkov clung stubbornly to his right to conduct a private medical practice, although this was forbidden." "In general, the family doctor is the most comforting figure in our lives. But he has been cut down and foreshortened. . . . Sometimes it's easier to find a wife than to find a doctor nowadays who is prepared to give you as much time as you need and understands you completely, all of you." It was accepted that the profit motive, compensation, and the professional spirit of charity could deliver comprehensive and quality medical care.

Medical education was traditionally sought by the best students, and the most qualified became their teachers. Appropriate future income and professional status also created competition for medical school admission based on merit, not class, gender, ethnicity, or race. For a talented individual with a brilliant mind, working hard, only to be rejected because of lacking some immutable characteristic, is not only immoral punishment but certainly paves the way to physicians' mediocrity.

Quite analogous in this country has been the welfare and entitlement states becoming more a part of the culture's leftward movement. It became apparent that the previous system of health care delivery and the physician basis for that care needed to be destroyed and replaced increasingly by the centrality of government. Of course, independent medical practices, the previous cottage industry of physician businesses, would be replaced by the corporatization of health care megaliths, by the insurance industry, and through entitlements that were increasingly regulated both directly for entitlements and indirectly for hospital systems and insurance companies.

Of course, now the private expenditures for health care in a competitive free market were increasingly replaced by governmental budgeting requirements. The intensity of such budgeting considerations has always magnified as deficits and debts swell for all countries adopting "Medicare for All" collectivist philosophy. Physician reimbursements were continuously lowered, salaries replaced revenue, and inventions such as the RVU system of compensation were created together with other schemes of managed care. In the end, the cost-prohibitive utopia of free health care for all depicted as a right rather than a privilege could only be

managed via pricing. Pricing is simply code for the multitude and variety of rationing strategies. If health care was a right, physicians, by caveat, had none. Freedom for doctors could actually be depicted as an oxymoron.

If this historical lesson applies to the evolution of health care in this country, a race toward the increasing socialization of medicine seems undeniable. Socialism never adds freedoms or protects what was “endowed by our creator” and memorialized in the Bill of Rights. It centralizes authority and grows government size and control at the expense of “inalienable” human freedom. It appears now quite non-debatable that doctors have become among the most freedom-deprived in our entire country. This did not happen by chance. It was intended by “elite” political classes needing this outcome for a more managed leftward society. Perhaps more tragically, it was allowed to happen by a profession that, if nothing else, should have been and should be characterized as free, independent, and possessive of always retaining the characteristics of critical thinkers.

This cannot end well. History repeatedly shows the folly of such thinking for the preservation of an exceptional profession of medicine with the provision of the best health care as its motivating objective for all of us who will someday need it. I am finally convinced that the words of Dr. Hendricks in Ayn Rand’s Atlas Shrugged were prophetic: “I have often wondered at the smugness with which people assert their right to enslave me, to control my work, to force my will, to violate my conscience, to stifle my mind.”

[Allan Dobzyniak](#) is an internal medicine physician.

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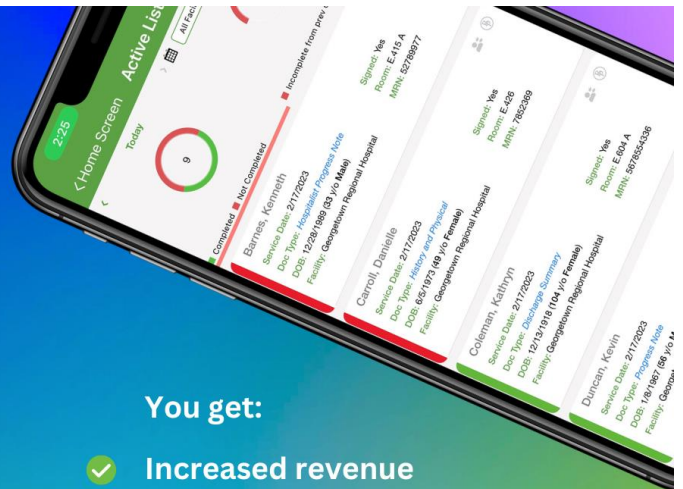
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A HOT NEW TREND IN LUXURY REAL ESTATE - SELLING AT AUCTION

Courtesy of Sotheby's

In the U.S., we've traditionally thought about the auction process as "the sale of last resort". Selling real estate at auction evokes images of a property being sold to this highest bidder on the steps of the county courthouse. Over the past few years, everything has changed. For many sellers, the auction process has become a convenient and efficient alternative that is vastly superior to the way homes are commonly listed and brought to market. This has long been the case in Europe and other parts of the world. The U.S. is finally catching up.



WHY IS THE AUCTION PROCESS BETTER FOR LUXURY HOMES?

In a limited local geography, the pool of potential buyers for a luxury home is likely to be limited. To find a qualified buyer, you're likely going to have to market a property regionally, nationally or even globally. Especially in the current interest rate environment, you may have to look to the Middle East or Asia to find prospective cash buyers for your multi-million dollar home. Your typical local real estate agent simply doesn't have the resources or capabilities to effectively market your home around the world.

6 REASONS TO CHOOSE A SALE BY AUCTION

Other reasons why luxury sellers are choosing the auction process are driven by the way the process has evolved. Here are six features of the process that strongly appeal luxury home sellers:

A SHORT DEFINED TIMELINE

The process offers an auction sale that is 60 days in length, from the initial marketing push to closing day. With a traditional sale, luxury properties can sit for months and even years, waiting for that unicorn buyer. Sellers often agree to price reductions in hope of hastening the sale, meanwhile expensive monthly carrying costs continue. With an auction sale, you can literally pick a date and know with certainty that 60 days later, you'll be moving on.

NO CONTINGENCIES

Luxury home sales can often be complicated with contingencies. Offers are made contingent on home inspections, appraisal or financing -- any of which can fall through on the way to closing. With an auction, buyers are forced to do all their due diligence before the auction. When they bid and win on auction day, the sale is final, and you are done selling your luxury home.

ACCESS TO A GLOBAL NETWORK OF ULTRA HIGH NET WORTH BUYERS

Most high-end real estate auction houses already have a global database of ultra-high net worth individuals. Your property is directly marketed to the most qualified audience possible.

A HIGHER RETURN

Sellers often net a substantially higher return with an auction sale. With a traditional sale, qualified prospective buyers come along infrequently and have no incentive to move quickly. The auction process forces prospective buyers to compete driving up the final sales price. The shorter sales cycle also means less carrying costs and maintenance, resulting in a higher net return.

A LUXURY EXPERIENCE

The auction process has been designed as a convenient luxury experience. From the moment you engage an auction company, you are assigned a dedicated project manager who is solely focused on your property. An entire marketing team is devoted to executing a comprehensive multi-channel marketing campaign to create awareness of your property globe. These campaigns include digital advertising, email campaigns, print ads and signage. You can sit back and relax or get started working on your new life in a new place, knowing that every detail will be attended for you.

YOU CAN STILL WORK WITH YOUR LOCAL AGENT

One of the best things about the Auctions is that you still get to work with your local agent. The auction process is thoroughly integrated with the real estate broker. You still have me as your advocate to ensure that local knowledge is incorporated in the marketing of your home. You still have a local advocate who will oversee everything and be accountable to you in person.

COMMON CONCERNS

HOW IS THE FINAL SALES PRICE DETERMINED?

One of the most common questions people have is about how the final sales price is determined? Where does the bidding start? Does my home get sold at any price if there aren't enough bidders? There are two auction formats:

Without Reserve - The property will sell to the highest bidder on auction day. There is no minimum bid that must be exceeded to purchase the property.

Reserve - The property will sell at or above a pre-determined price threshold on auction day. In the Reserve format, the auctioneer will use a Counter Bid to move the bidding closer to the Reserve price. Counter bidding is common practice throughout the auction industry to help buyers and sellers reach a price that works for both parties.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF AN AUCTION SALE?

Sellers do not pay an up-front Engagement Fee, but are responsible for the title search and title insurance. Buyers pay a premium on the high bid amount and any applicable transfer fees. The seller pays broker commissions.



Why Creativity in Medicine Can Inspire the Next Generation of Doctors

Ryan McCarthy, MD

It was like being struck by lightning during the chorus, the recognition that Paul Simon was singing directly to me. “Medicine is magical, and magical is art,” he sang, and I turned up the radio, convinced that I was supposed to hear these lyrics—a tender moment in which I was vulnerable to possibility. The hair on my neck stood up and warmth washed over me, the telltale signs that this insight was true and real. I sang along, and it was like hearing “The Boy in the Bubble,” a song from the album *Graceland*, for the first time.

I had been spending a great deal of time building an academic program, an internal medicine residency to be specific. Much of this process is exactly what you think it is: meetings, emails, committees, planning, list-making, and such. New to graduate medical education, it took me almost a year to settle into the often tedious rhythm of this job, all the while an indistinct voice pestered me. I wasn’t sure what it was trying to say, but it wouldn’t go away. That is, until, in this cosmic instant, I knew exactly what it was saying to me.

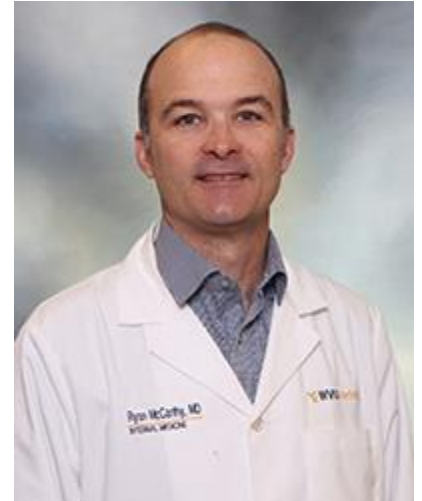
Viewed through a traditional lens, a medical residency is—mostly—a job and—partially—a school. It’s actually both, but the work dominates to the point that its long hours are famous in the American psyche. A residency must provide oversight to young doctors so they can, in a controlled environment, learn to see patients on their own. And, at the same time, these doctors need academic lectures, the rigorous kind which form the nerdy soul of internal medicine. This is serious business and hard work. But, the more I sang, the more I was convinced that I was going to be a program director who would do something radical.

A week before my car singalong, I had listened to an interview with the film director Sir Steve McQueen on the BBC. His insights on the creative process at large, and his specifically, resonated with me. So much so that, when I heard him, I stopped jogging and typed notes on my phone. When I did this, my dog Trixie gave me the look, the one that said, “Again—really?” She sat on the gravel and stared into the sky as my fingers tapped, alternately shaking and nodding my head. Warmth engulfed me.

I was spellbound by Sir Steve’s unwavering commitment to “the work,” a humility and philosophy which made him approach each project like it was his very first day. This sincere, innocent, and honest take on creative work spoke to me, in part, because I have always believed that medicine beckons me to do the same. I had tried for years to figure out how to show up and see each day anew. I had often spoken and written of the intersection of my work and art, ancient alchemy which could produce magic, if only I could get out of the way.

While doing the tedious, but necessary, work of residency building, I had become convinced that, if I was brave enough, I might actually listen to the voice inside me, the one that told me that I could possibly be building my life’s art project.

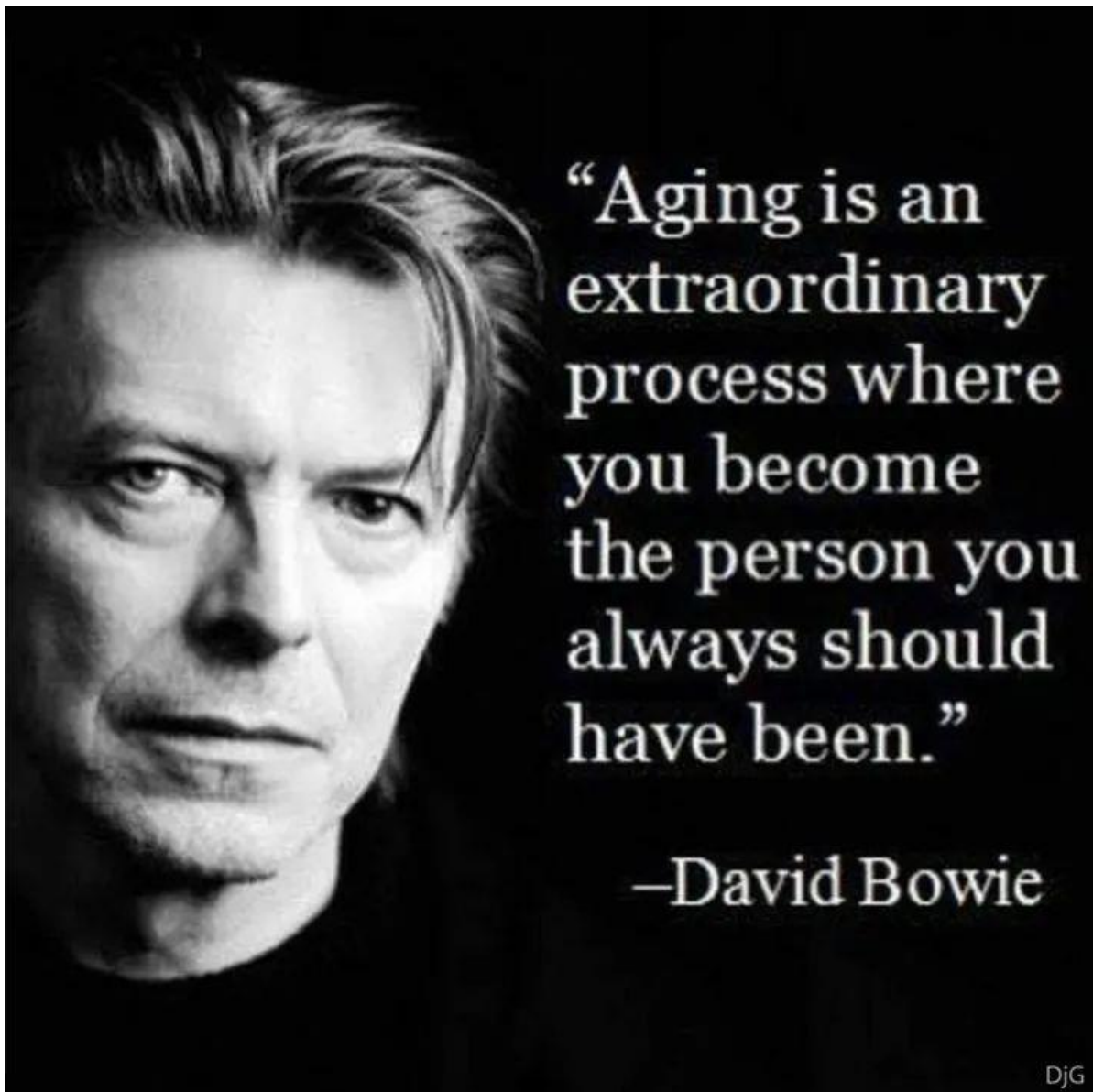
The residency-as-art might sound crazy to some, and I am sure it will to some in my institution—that’s OK. I’m taking care of the serious business, which is how I will be measured and graded by the academy. But to me, an internal medicine doctor for two decades, it feels like a stroke of genius, one so obvious that it has been hiding in plain sight. Maybe this is why it took Paul Simon to open the portal and share a glimmer of the magic, the one Sir Steve dangled in front of me.



It's more clear with each passing day which lectures will comprise our curriculum, and it is satisfying to watch this architecture form a structure. My residents need to ultimately pass the American Board of Internal Medicine exam, and I think about this responsibility daily. This requires work, and at the same time we are mentoring them and teaching about congestive heart failure and diabetic foot infections, I am going to bring my artistic spark—the one that invites me to model a creative ethos for my young doctors, one which is constantly threatened in our impersonal medical “system.”

Sir Steve, Paul Simon, and I are kindred spirits, and I believe the intersection of our creative habits is meaningful, so much so that they are, basically, ghostwriting my residency curriculum. I'm not going to tell too many people about this, lest I freak them out. After so many years of not being true to myself, I am finally brave enough that, when the warmth floods me, I know that I am, in fact, receiving the inspiration that will help me produce young doctors who practice like artists. I just need to lead by example, showing them that “these are days of miracles and wonder.”

[Ryan McCarthy](#) is an internal medicine physician.



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GRILLED SALMON BURGERS WITH DILL YOGURT SAUCE

thefoodiephysician.com

Are you looking for more ways to incorporate seafood into your family's meals? If so, try my *Grilled Salmon Burgers with Dill Yogurt Sauce*. They're easy to make, full of flavor, and you can just throw them on the grill- they cook in about 8 minutes.

These grilled salmon burgers are another great vehicle to introduce fish to your children. After all, who doesn't love burgers?

INGREDIENTS FOR GRILLED SALMON BURGERS

- **Salmon**- use skinless salmon filets. I like to use wild Alaskan salmon when possible.
- **Old Bay Seasoning**- a blend of herbs and spices that's perfect for seafood
- **Mayonnaise**- adds moisture and helps bind the burgers
- **Dijon mustard**- adds flavor and moisture
- **Breadcrumbs**- bind the burgers so they don't fall apart on the grill. I use panko breadcrumbs because they're airier than traditional dried breadcrumbs so they give the patties a lighter texture. You can also make homemade breadcrumbs from fresh bread.
- **Scallions**- adds a mild onion flavor. You can substitute shallots.
- **Lemon juice and zest**- add brightness and acidity
- **Greek yogurt**- the base of the Dill Yogurt Sauce. Can substitute sour cream or use a mixture of half yogurt, half sour cream.
- **Sriracha**- can substitute any hot sauce. I like to add a little spice to these burgers but you can leave it out if you prefer.
- **Dill**- salmon and dill are a natural pairing. Fresh dill takes the Dill Yogurt Sauce to the next level but you can substitute dried if you can't find fresh.



Ingredients

- ☐ 1 ½ lbs skinless salmon fillet (I like to use wild Alaskan salmon)
- ☐ 3 scallions, sliced
- ☐ 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- ☐ 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- ☐ 1 ½ teaspoon Old Bay seasoning

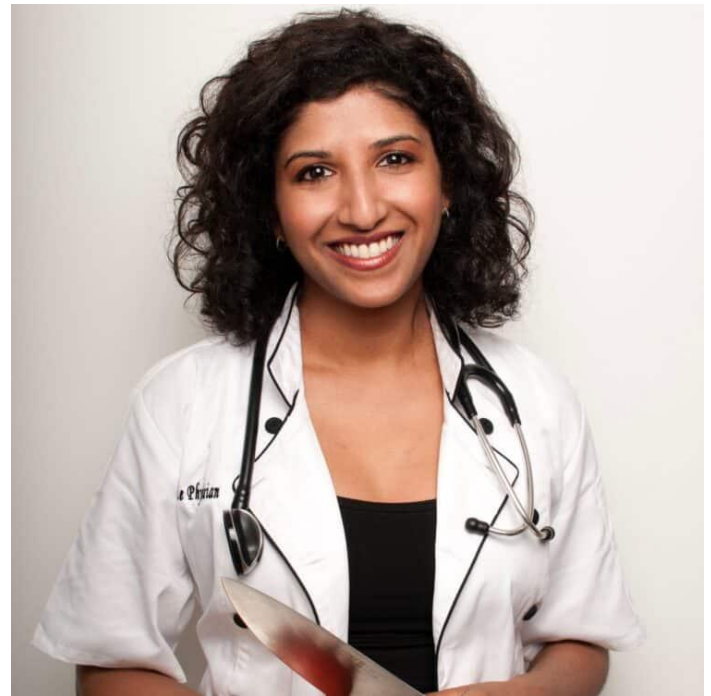
- ☐ 2 teaspoons lemon juice plus 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- ☐ ½ cup panko breadcrumbs
- ☐ 1 teaspoon Sriracha or other hot sauce
- ☐ ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ☐ ¼ teaspoon black pepper

Dill Yogurt Sauce:

- ☐ ¾ cup plain reduced fat Greek yogurt
- ☐ 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ☐ 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- ☐ 1 ½ tablespoons fresh, chopped dill
- ☐ Salt and pepper

Other:

- ☐ Oil for brushing the grill
- ☐ 6 multigrain hamburger buns or bread, toasted
- ☐ Assorted toppings like sliced avocado, tomato or baby spinach



Instructions

1. Cut the salmon roughly into chunks and place the pieces in a food processor. Pulse until salmon is ground into a paste but still has some small pieces for texture. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and add the scallions, mustard, mayonnaise, Old Bay, lemon juice, zest, breadcrumbs, hot sauce, salt and pepper.
2. Gently mix the ingredients together until combined. Form the mixture into 6 equal patties. Refrigerate the burgers for 15 minutes to firm up before cooking.
3. To make the sauce, mix the yogurt, mustard, lemon juice, and dill together in a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Heat a grill or stovetop grill pan over medium high heat. Add the burgers and cook 3-4 minutes until browned on the bottom. Flip the burgers over and cook an additional 3-4 minutes until cooked through. Serve the burgers on toasted buns with dill yogurt sauce and desired toppings.



CHEF'S TIP - I like to refrigerate the patties for about 15 minutes to allow them to firm up before cooking. Salmon burgers are not as firm as traditional beef burgers and this will help prevent them from falling apart on the grill.

DILL YOGURT SAUCE FOR SALMON BURGERS

I top these Grilled Salmon Burgers with a simple yogurt sauce mixed with fresh dill. After all, salmon and dill are a classic pairing! You can also substitute sour cream for the yogurt or use a mixture of half yogurt, half sour cream.

To add flavor to the sauce, I stir in a little Dijon mustard and lemon juice. Simple and delicious!

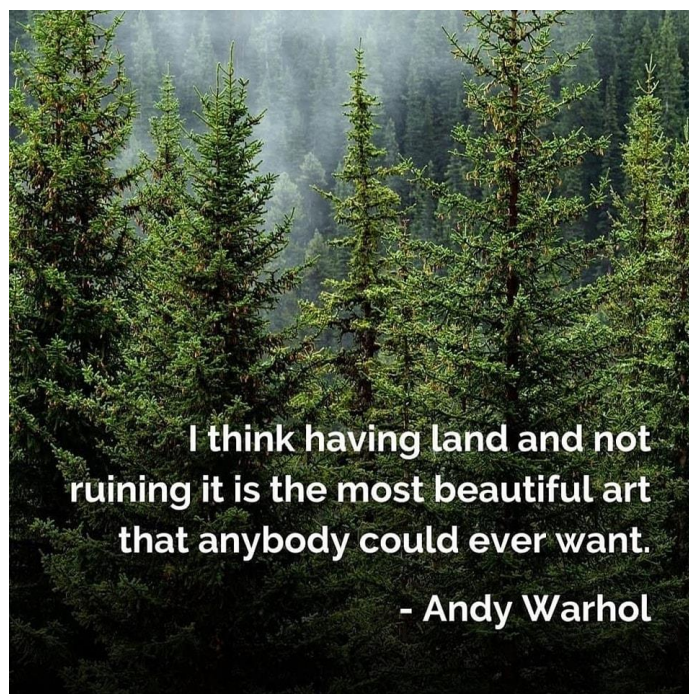
HOW TO SERVE THESE BURGERS

I like to serve these grilled salmon burgers on toasted hamburger buns or whole grain bread with the Dill Yogurt Sauce drizzled on top.

You can add your favorite burger toppings like lettuce, tomato or red onion. My personal favorite is avocado. There's something about the combination of salmon and creamy avocado that's just perfect!

Everything here looks like it was built to last – not just the walls and the walkways – but the way it makes you feel. It feels like you've found something rare, something that doesn't fade.

Photos: Aloïs Maillet / Dan Glasser



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When is Healthcare “Good Enough”?

BY HANS DUVEFELT, MD

If I have a Medicare patient with a hemoglobin A1c greater than my quality rating goes down. The target value is 7 for people under 80 and 8 for people older than that. But as long as my patient is under 9, I’m in good shape.

The magic number for inadequate blood pressure control is 140/90 greater. But 139/89 is a passing grade, even though studies have shown that for high risk patients with known heart disease, a target under 120/80 is desirable.

So what’s a busy doctor going to do? I’m afraid the answer in many situations is just aim for good enough, because that’s all we are being measured by.

I worry a little bit that our quality ratings might make us put so much effort into the outliers that we don’t have enough time or energy left to fine-tune the people who are off the mark but not in the range that hurts our scorecards.

Oftentimes the outliers, for example with diabetes, are people who don’t believe in the severity of their situation or people with social circumstances that prevent them from eating healthy, which is often a money problem relating to lack of financial resources to buy healthy foods.

So where do we put our effort? Bringing the few outliers into a desired range or bringing a large number of “good enough” control patients to more ideal levels? Our incentives are aimed at going after the outliers, but maybe we will do more good if we focus more on the relatively large number of patients who are just a little bit below those panic values.

For an individual doctor with a unique patient population, maybe we need to decide where to cut losses for the outliers so that we don’t neglect a larger cohort of patients who might need more focus and attention from us. Because, really, this is about our patient population’s health and well-being, more than our own scorecards.

There was a time when doctors focused on each patient in front of them without considering how that attention would affect other people with bigger problems, or those who didn’t have a doctor to turn to. Now, we have obligations to others, like the insurance companies, which can create tension in our own decision-making about where to put our effort.



9,

or

are

**“Always do what
you are afraid
to do.”**

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

What Would the Ideal Hospital Look Like?

The following points about the ideal hospital might sound utopistic or even naive; however, each one has already been implemented in a hospital somewhere in the world, proving it's indeed not some dreamy speculation.

By Dr. Bertalan Mesko, PhD



Key Takeaways

We summarized the major features of an ideal hospital in the age of digital health and AI.

Some of these ideas have already been implemented in practice.

If your imagination could run wild, how would you envision the future of hospitals? Hi-tech big machines, physicians analyzing data obtained from patients' devices, LED screens greeting visitors by their names using facial recognition, virtual patient visits, and robots leading operations... Well, experts have pretty much the [same idea](#).

Recently, we have written a lot about the future of hospitals. We emphasized the importance of good design both [inside](#) and [outside](#) the point of care. We imagined that these institutions will become *"health centers for patients for preventing diseases, for acute care patients and for patients who need surgical procedures or large radiology machines."*

The following points about the ideal hospital might sound utopistic or even naive; however, each one has already been implemented in a hospital somewhere in the world, proving it's indeed not some dreamy speculation.

The need for speed

On The Medical Futurist [Patreon channel](#), Kimberly Powell, VP of NVIDIA [talked](#) about how NVIDIA could build hospitals in a matter of days. She went on about how NVIDIA envisions these institutions. *"Hospitals will use AI cameras to automatically screen for elevated body temperature, use genomics sequencing to predict how*

lethal a virus or suspected condition could be for each patient, use AI in medical imaging for detection and predicting clinical outcomes, incorporate AI into everyday cameras and microphones to monitor and interact with patients.”

In going a full 360 on hospitals, we decided to give you a full insight into how a hospital in 2030 should (and even could) look like. As you’ll see, it won’t take a leap into science fiction; instead, these are logical and unambiguous steps, leading to better patient experience, lowering healthcare costs and safe data handling. We have already seen some elements of the following in practice, but not all in one institution. Let’s have a look.

The ideal hospital is...

1. ...paperless

Yes, it starts here. Patient data stored on paper is as old as medicine itself. Now is the time to get rid of paper entirely. There is no place for paper and handwriting in a well-functioning hospital. (Yes, this is also the end of illegible doctors’ notes.) Eliminating paper-based records is a huge undertaking – but achievable. For example, Bedfordshire Hospital NHS Trust has been successfully working with Xerox on reaching this goal. The hospital uses an electronic document management system for handling patient records, digitizing paper records, thereby also adding to patient data security.

“There was an area within the pediatric service with benching on the side,” Josh Chandler, associate director of IT for the Trust explained in [this article](#). *“It was always completely taken up with patient notes that had been tracked in for that day’s clinics. That’s now all completely empty because it’s all accessible through a computer.”* The next steps will be data intake and safe remote data management. That is still to come, for this particular hospital, but they set a good example for others. To see how to ensure a smooth transition, check out these [five steps](#) to a paperless hospital.

2. ...connected to the homes of patients

An ideal hospital aims for patients to spend as little time as possible within its walls. The place of treatment should be the patient’s home; just as well as the place of diagnostics and the place of rehabilitation. What is needed to achieve this is first and foremost good connection. Staff and data should be connected with the hospital and the patients’ homes. If a hospital has 5G with wi-fi in the wards, the data will run faster than people. This will allow faster decision-making and future-readiness.

One of the world’s first 5G-enabled hospitals was the Veterans Affairs Department’s healthcare facility in Palo Alto, California. At the launch of the concept, the hospital [stated](#) *“VA providers are presently tapping into virtual reality to treat patients with post-traumatic stress disorder and piloting exoskeleton devices to help vets with spinal cord injuries regain their mobility—both of which could possibly be enhanced through the budding technology.”* The team primarily used the capacities and the connectivity in medical education.

Moreover, with the pandemic, [the team also](#) *“recognized that the system also offered an opportunity to bring people who are meant to be social distancing together in a virtual environment and enable them to collectively interact.”*

3. ...designed, not built for a purpose

Through its [Patient Room 2020](#) project, non-profit design organization NXT Health aimed to design the future of hospital rooms. It’s a high-achieving, inspiring project built with designers along with healthcare professionals with [the aim](#) to *“both improve patient experience and optimize caregiver performance.”* It

features a streamlined, patient-centered design, deployable bedside work area with embedded technology as well as various safety features. Unfortunately, the project has not (yet) been deployed anywhere, proving that even the best ideas can get stuck at viability.

But indeed, the design of a hospital building should not facilitate the meeting of patients and doctors; it should be planned so that patients and doctors can meet there *in the best conditions*. We [recently wrote](#) about the specific hospital design both in- and outside the point of care in our articles. There we explained with our experts how interior spaces and patient rooms should be built; and pointed out four key elements for future (re)designs of medical institutions.

4. ...would use patient design

We wrote about it over and over again: the ideal hospital is designed by patients. This is exactly what Professor Stefaan Bergé did. He [redesigned](#) his whole department based on the book, [The Guide to the Future of Medicine](#), covering patients' suggestions. It turned out that patients wanted the simplest things like more privacy and more information. But as hospital design [directly affects](#) how patients receive care and, ultimately, how they heal, the design of these institutions should also change. The spaces should help the best possible patient experience, should be compassionate, and should even decrease the stress of incoming patients.

Who else would know better how to create a human-centered hospital room than the patients themselves? We described this in detail in a scientific [paper](#).

5. ...would have special places for telemedicine

COVID-19 has changed how we look at healing altogether. It helped us realize how many tasks could be conducted from afar, often with much greater efficiency. [Telemedicine](#) came and conquered, and will stay with us even with the pandemic gone. The fact that patients don't actually need to get to the hospital/clinic, and doctors don't necessarily need to meet them in person decreases stress and time wasted – but the effectiveness of the consultation remains, at least in most cases.

Remote patient monitoring works well for example at UCLA Health in their post-surgical remote monitoring program. Their [Cardiac Telehealth Program](#) is for patients who undergo heart surgery. Therein patients receive a cardiac telehealth kit upon leaving the hospital. This telehealth technology can send important health data over the internet to UCLA nursing staff, but patients can also contact their doctors using the tablet provided in the kit.

Hospital design needs to follow this transformation; and even provide doctors with dedicated teleconsultation spaces with appropriate [design](#), devices, connection, lamps, and an acceptable hospital background for the video. Pretty much like a miniature studio within the hospital. It's important to have proper patient rooms in the hospital; it should be just as important to have the right venue for remote care because that is the new norm.

6. ...has places for healthcare personnel to relax

The well-being of healthcare personnel also got exposed during the pandemic – and hospitals, in general, were falling short. Well-maintained and equipped common rooms and resting spaces should be provided for frontline personnel even outside a pandemic. The pressure for these people both physically and mentally is [so high](#) that hospitals need to create the opportunity for them to recharge. The ideal hospital should be a wellness centre for patients AND health personnel alike.

A good example here is the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. Here David Putrino, Ph.D., Co-Director of the Abilities Research Center and Director of Rehabilitation Innovation at the Mount Sinai Health System, has “converted his lab into recharge rooms for front-line healthcare workers.” Along with his team, he created “*multi-sensory experiences that can reduce stress in just 15 minutes*” – he explained in [this podcast](#).

Source: https://twitter.com/miss_pilling

7. ...should resolve the issue of alarm fatigue

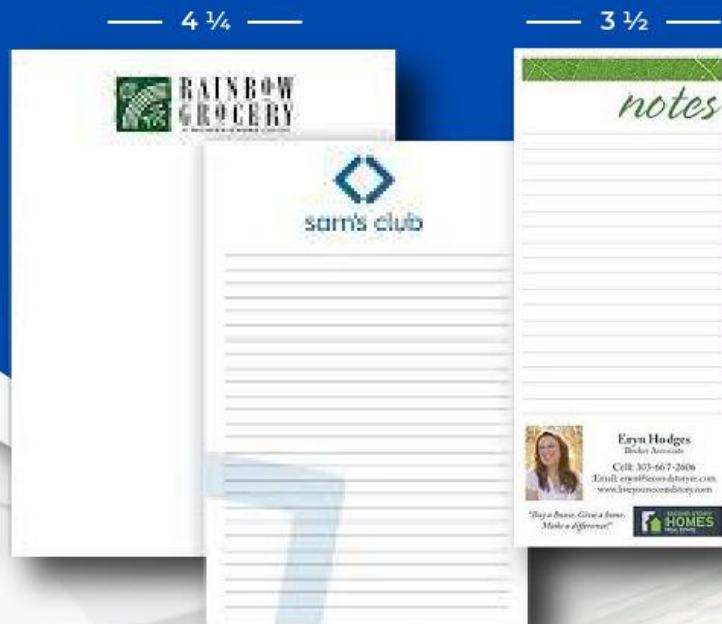
Even today’s institutions are packed with technology, and the hospital of the future will be even more so. All these devices have their own alarm systems. Caregivers can therefore become desensitized to alarm signs from the myriad of devices emitting a cacophony of beeps all day in the clinical setting. There are as many as [187 alarms per bed per day](#). 72% to 99% of these are [false alarms](#), it’s understandable that alarm fatigue came to exist. Healthcare practitioners are easily at risk of disregarding important alerts, which might even be fatal. A.I. could be a solution to this issue: researchers have developed an A.I. solution to help caregivers cope with auditory overload.

Describing [The Ideal Hospital of the Future](#) in 1932, authors argue that there is no need for radical change in hospital operations. Perhaps it wasn’t needed then, but it certainly is today. With the increasing use of digitization, AI, other technologies, as well as the flourishing development of patient empowerment, the demands towards our hospitals are changing rapidly and radically. It is up to us to stand up for these changes to actually happen.



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Live music. Smoky BBQ. Colorful murals. Millions of fuzzy, flying little bats. Uhh, what was that last bit?

Let me first start off by saying that bats are adorable. Like, scroll through [this post](#) and tell me that you think bats are *scary*. You want to know what's scary? Austin's most famous serial killer, the Servant Girl Annihilator. Yes, that's the word they used: *annihilator*. Look at a cuddly, fuzzy little bat in its giant, adorable eyes and tell me it looks like it could annihilate anything other than my heart. *Also, yes: I am biased because my dog totally looks like a bat in the face.*

Whoops, I'm getting really off-subject. **Austin, Texas is one of the most beloved cities in the USA.** A city that defies expectations, is totally and wonderfully weird, and has everything to offer a visitor on a 3-day weekend! Gorgeous downtown Austin, Texas!

ALL ABOUT AUSTIN, TEXAS

As a native Texan who fled to the haven of Austin nearly 20 years ago (*it's not anything like the rest of the state, y'all*), I love coming back home here whenever I'm not traveling elsewhere in the world. It's a fun city with a unique vibe.

I'll admit the city has changed a lot over the past 10 years, it has experienced a surge of growth as it hit "best places to live" lists in magazines, newspapers, and websites over and over.

The Austin we know today started out as a town called "Waterloo" in the 1800s, back then it was a buffalo-hunting region occupied by the Tonkawa and Comanche.

In 1839, it was selected by scouts as the site for the permanent capital of the Republic of Texas and renamed to honor Stephen F. Austin, father of the republic (*and I have to admit, sometimes Texans still act like we're living in our own republic!*).

Just a few decades ago, Austin was still a sleepy college town with a large hippie contingent and major quirky factor. That atmosphere still persists in spite of the fact that it's grown into quite a cosmopolitan city! That

said, some of that growth has been negative (mostly the traffic, and when you visit you'll hear locals bitch endlessly about this, as well as lament the "old" places that have closed to give way to new, hip spots). But with its magical mix of artists and entrepreneurs, hipsters and hippies, musicians and high-tech professionals, Austin is still an amazing place to live and visit, and has a lot to offer for everyone.

To begin with, the setting is beautiful, in rolling Texas Hill Country and with abundant parks, green spaces, and outdoor recreation. It's not called the "live music capital of the world" for nothing (a moniker, by the way, that we gave to ourselves): on any given night some 75 musical acts play around town everywhere from major stages to small coffee houses and even the supermarket.

The creative culture here is vibrant and infuses everything, from that healthy music scene to the visual arts, working studios and galleries, museums and cultural events.

If you have only three days to spend in my hometown, here is the weekend in Austin itinerary I would suggest to fully experience the capital city that's so different from the rest of Texas!



Austin, Texas is all about street art and music!

WHEN TO VISIT AUSTIN

Honestly, Austin is a year-round destination. The spring and fall are the most pleasant times to visit, with mostly gorgeous weather. It's also the most crowded/popular, with major events like the South by Southwest Festival (March) and the Austin City Limits Music Festival (October).

Winters are pretty mild, although we do get several cold snaps and even freezing weather — but they're brief and two days later we might be in shorts and t-shirts again.

Summer is fun and there are lots going on then, but non-Southerners need to understand that Texas summers are hot. I mean, *hot*. July and August will routinely break 100 degrees daily; but *everything* is air-conditioned,

and the city has tons of places to keep cool, like natural swimming holes! (Note from Lia: This is my favorite swimming hole near Austin.



Outside of the iconic Austin Motel.

WHERE TO STAY IN AUSTIN

Austin has a killer variety of accommodations — from the fun and quirky and from budget to splurge. If you love boutique hotels, you can't go wrong with Heywood Hotel, a gorgeous renovated 1920s bungalow on the happening East Side. Also in that neighborhood is the affordable and super-chic East Austin Hotel.

If you're trying not to spend big bucks, you don't have to sacrifice the cool factor. We have some incredible hostels: check out the ultra-hip Native Hostel, a gathering place of creatives and thinkers, that offers everything from live music to yoga (*locals love it, too!*). The hostel is perfectly situated at the intersection of Austin's artsy East side and the downtown entertainment district.

Located squarely downtown is Firehouse Hostel, which was created in an actual historic fire station; a bonus is its cocktail bar, which is hidden speakeasy-style behind a rolling bookcase.

Although there are short term rental restrictions in Austin, there are a handful of excellent places to stay.

- West End Bungalow: This adorable bungalow in the heart of Texas's West End and has a private front patio with seating and lighting, perfect for sitting under the stars.
- Austin Retreat: This beautiful two-story property has its own backyard and you can bring dogs! With colorful furnishings, huge bright windows, and plenty of space to stay with friends. Located in trendy Travis Heights, we love this house!
- The Forest Retreat: Across the river, in downtown Austin, this cottage in a wooded lot feels totally rural yet you are within walking distance to SoCo and downtown. The property also has a huge swimming pool and lake with an adorable bridge. A hidden gem in the city!



The area of South Congress Avenue, is an area of Austin, TX that leads directly into downtown Austin, ending at the state capitol.

HOW TO GET TO AUSTIN

The Austin-Bergstrom International airport recently expanded with a second, small terminal, and every month we get more and more nonstop flights from around the country and world.

There isn't really another good way of getting here from farther away in the country or globe (unless you're ready for a really long ride); but if you're coming from elsewhere in Texas or a nearby state, you could also take a look at Amtrak's train schedule, Megabus or Greyhound. Budget Travel Tip: Booked a flight yet? We recommend using Kayak to price-compare flight deals & dates before you book to save money on your flight.



View from above of the 360 bridge traffic in Austin, Texas.

HOW TO GET AROUND AUSTIN

If you aren't familiar with Texas, it's not the most public-transportation friendly area of the country. But one of the ways Austin differs from the rest of the state is that Austin does have a pretty decent system with [Cap Metro](#), which operates both a city-wide bus system and a light rail that runs between downtown to Leander, way north of the city.

You may not even need the bus, though. If you're staying in one of the concentrated neighborhoods of Austin — **downtown, Eastside, South Congress/Lamar, the University area or Midtown/North Central** — they are pretty walkable.

Austin is also a huge bicycling town, with lots of bike rental companies in town along with the ubiquitous electric scooters.

And if all else fails, there's always ride sharing (Uber and Lyft, etc) and taxis. You can also rent a car direct from the airport and get around Austin at your own pace.

Now that you have all the when, where and how logistical tips, let's get down to the fun part: **What should you do with a few days in the Lone Star State Capital City?**



Outside of the Texas State Capitol.

AUSTIN WEEKEND ITINERARY: DAY 1

For your first day in Austin, you'll explore Austin's history and culture, get in touch with the city's weird side, and meet its most famous resident critters. Let's get started!

BREAKFAST TACOS

Let's start this 3 days in Austin itinerary off right, with one of Austin's most famous delicacies: **tacos**! Yes, for breakfast! If you've never had tacos for breakfast before, you're in for a treat. The taco is practically the state dish of Texas, so much so that we eat them any time of the day.

Breakfast tacos aren't that different from any taco, in that they can be filled with a nearly endless variety of ingredients; but they are typically a soft taco rather than crunchy, and fillings like egg and potatoes are common.

Start your day off right by heading over to Austin institution **Jo's Coffee** and grab a cup of java along with the choice of a wide assortment of breakfast tacos – we recommend the Migas. They have a location downtown, or hit Jo's on South Congress and get a pic at the iconic "I love you so much" wall.

LEARN ABOUT AUSTIN'S HISTORY & CULTURE

Once you've fueled up, start exploring the heart of Austin at the **State Capitol**, where you can take a free tour. You'll see the legislative chambers (*yasss, democracy!*) as well as historical artifacts.

Directly across the street from the Capitol, you'll find the **Texas Governor's Mansion**, the oldest continuously occupied executive residence west of the Mississippi. Discover more of Texas' colorful history on a free guided tour, available Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Afterward, your history lesson, stroll down the tree-lined Congress Avenue to the **Mexic-Arte Museum**, showcasing contemporary Mexican, Latino, and Latino art and culture. After all, Mexican heritage is the foundation of Texas.

Now that you've been sufficiently historic and cultural, it's time to dive into modern-day Austin and head to the **Museum of the Weird** around the corner on 6th street. The name of this old-timey dime museum says it all: you'll find an array of curios & oddities, from Bigfoot to shrunken heads, a cyclops pig, a hand of glory (*supposedly the dried and pickled hand of a man who has been hanged*), a two-headed chicken. You'll learn about the legend of "The Minnesota Iceman" and even see a live sideshow – just be sure to tip the performers.

After that – if you've still got an appetite for lunch – head a block away to the historic **Driskill Hotel**, the oldest hotel in Austin. There you will find one of Austin's best lunchtime spots, the **1886 Café & Bakery**, which serves homemade gourmet sandwiches, soups, and salads – but the real draw is the sinful desserts, like their famous 1886 Chocolate Cake. I've run into local celebs there like Matthew McConaughey and Robert Duvall, as well as TV travel host Samantha Brown filming a segment!

EXPLORE SOUTH CONGRESS (SOCO)

After lunch, work off that chocolate cake by heading across the Congress Avenue Bridge to **South Congress Avenue**. Known as SoCo to locals, this stretch (*between Academy & Annie Streets*) is home to numerous vintage stores, boutiques, restaurants, and clubs, as well as street performers and pop-up artisan fairs.

The best way to experience South Congress is just by walking and stopping at absolutely anything that looks interesting!

- **Parts & Labor**: A boutique store featuring gifts and art made exclusively by Texas-based artists.

- **Lucy in Disguise with Diamonds:** A fantastic and quirky costume and vintage shop. Save room in your luggage for wigs!

Amy's Ice Cream: This locally beloved institution is said to have the best ice cream in Austin – if not all of Texas! With over 350 rotating flavors, you're bound to find something new.

After a few hours of wonderfully aimless browsing, it's time for dinner. There are a few excellent places to get dinner in SoCo:

- Funky **Guero's Taco Bar** serves up down-home Austin Tex-Mex – this was Bill Clinton's favorite restaurant in town.
- Famous Austin taco institution **Torchy's Tacos** has a South Congress location Tacos for breakfast, tacos for dinner... welcome to Texas, I say.
- There are also plenty of food trucks in the area, all of them good. (*Seriously, I've never had one bad food truck meal in Austin*). Take your pick!
- For something a little less casual, I recommend **South Congress Café**.



The Austin Bats fly out from under the Congress bridge every night from March through November. Watch them from the water on a kayak tour! Photo Credit: "[austin bats0053](#)" (CC BY-SA 2.0) by [mrlaugh](#)

MEET THE AUSTIN BATS

Before or after dinner (*depending on the time of year*), gather at the Congress Avenue Bridge for one of the most unusual, magnificent sites in the US — **the bat flight**.

You see, this bridge hides a secret: underneath it lives the world's largest urban colony of Mexican free-tailed bats, 1.5 million of them to be precise. *Yes, I said million.*

Every night at sunset from March through November, the bats leave the bridge en masse for the night and fly east across Lady Bird Lake – a sight so awesome that it draws hundreds of spectators each evening. It’s a quintessential Austin experience that you absolutely can’t miss!

Travel Tip: Experience the bat flight from a whole new angle on a [sunset kayaking tour](#)! You’ll get a front-row seat to the show, plus a taste of Austin’s outdoorsy side. Prefer to be above the bats rather than below them (*/get it*)? Take a [bat-watching bike tour](#) instead!



After the sun sets – and the bats are out – Austin turns into a live music lover’s dream! Original Photo Credit: [“congress ave bridge”](#) (CC BY-SA 2.0) by [robzand](#)

DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

After the sun goes down and the bats head off to munch on mosquitos and do other adorable and helpful things (*bats are the cutest, don’t @ me*) head back to South Congress to the famous local institution, the [Continental Club](#) — because surely you came to Austin to hear some music!

With a rockabilly 1950s décor and a decades-long history of top musical acts, a night out doesn’t get much better than this. It’s hard to know what kind of music will be playing that night: it could be rock, country, jazz & blues, local bands, or someone famous! But no matter what, you’ll definitely have a good time.

Travel Tip: Want to experience MORE live music in Austin? This [live music crawl](#) led by a local Austin musician will take you to three iconic clubs and up-and-coming venues to experience the best and most authentic live music Austin has to offer!

AUSTIN WEEKEND ITINERARY: DAY 2

Today, you’ll get outdoors and soak up at the sun in Austin’s giant city park, followed by an afternoon choose-your-own adventure: touring or museum.

ENJOY ZILKER PARK

To fuel up for your day, grab some coffee and breakfast tacos at [Austin Java](#) downtown or [Torchy's](#) near Zilker Park. If you're taco'ed out but still have room for delicious, over-the-top southern comfort food, hit up the [Biscuits & Groovy food truck](#) on Barton Springs. Once you're sufficiently fueled, it's time to take advantage of Austin's natural beauty and explore the great outdoors – within the city!

Head to Lady Bird Lake and the sprawling oasis of [Zilker Park](#), the city's green crown jewel with 358 acres spread through the heart of Austin!

One of the most refreshing things to do in Zilker Park when it's warm outside is to swim at [Barton Springs](#), a natural underground spring-fed pool that stays a cool 68 degrees year-round.

Or, just enjoy Lady Bird Lake! You can rent kayaks, stand-up paddleboards or paddleboats at several places along the lake (*which is actually just part of the Colorado River*), such as [Live Love Paddle](#) or [EpicSUP](#). If you are made of muscle, you can even take a [SUP yoga class](#).

Prefer to stay dry? Rent a bike – or [book a bike tour](#) – to explore the park on the [Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail](#) and Boardwalk. The complete route makes a 10-mile circuit around stunning Lady Bird Lake, and is one of the [best hikes in Austin](#).

OPTION 1: MUSEUM-ING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

After a morning spent outdoors, the afternoon presents a perfect opportunity to visit one of Austin's museums. Head towards the University of Texas, and take advantage of being on campus by having brunch or lunch at [Kerbey Lane Cafe](#), one of the locals' most beloved eateries (*open 24 hours*). Their queso played a role in Richard Linklater's film [Boyhood](#), and there's even a mural on the restaurant documenting Austin's love affair with the melted cheese dip.

When you're sufficiently ready to museum, art vultures can visit the [Blanton](#), our premier fine art museum that showcases regional artists to international exhibits; and history lovers can take in the [Bullock Texas State History Museum](#), an interactive and immersive experience in learning the story of Texas.

OPTION 2: TAKE A TOUR OF AUSTIN

If yesterday was enough museums for you or you're up for even more time outside, the perfect way to spend your day today is to take a tour of Austin! Guided tours are a fantastic way to explore a new place because you learn a ton of local history, get to see a side of the city you never would've known even existed, and have a whole bunch of fun (*and, frequently, food*).

Here are a few suggestions:

- **[Secret Austin Food Tour](#):** Navigate past the tourist traps and into the best restaurants in Austin as you learn about the city's history and quirks, see cultural landmarks, and of course, eat a bunch of incredible food! As you taste dishes dating back to Austin's Aztec days, you'll learn how the Aztecs, as well as our immigrants, have shaped the flavors of this modern metropolis.
- **[Keep Austin Weird Scavenger Hunt](#):** Get to know the weirder side of Austin by completing wacky missions all over town while learning about this unique city's best-kept secrets, quirks, conversation pieces, local secrets, points of interest, fun facts, history, art, culture and more! Plus, as a bonus, you can aggressively compete against your loved ones.
- **[Weird Austin City Tour](#):** How did Austin get its "weird" reputation? Why is Willie Nelson worshipped like a king? What's the deal with all the bats? Why are locals getting into bar fights over the best breakfast taco? You'll learn all the weird and wild tales of Austin on the Weird

Austin City Tour, which includes enjoying live music, sampling local foods and beers, and the perfect street art & skyline photo ops.

- **Texas BBQ & Winery Tour:** This tour takes you into stunning Texas Hill country to 2 local wineries and one of the best BBQ joints near Austin, Salt Lick. You'll start before noon by filling up with insanely good BBQ, then get progressively more wine-drunk. Aww hiss. *Note: this is totally doable as a self-guided tour if you have a car and a DD!*
- **Brewery Tour (with BBQ!):** Breweries, BBQ, and local history – need we say more? *Psst: if you prefer a brewery tour without the BBQ, here's another option!*



On campus at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas.

LIVE MUSIC ON DOWNTOWN SIXTH STREET

When night falls, Austin wakes up — it's definitely a town where people know how to have fun. If you're a party animal you'll want to check out famed **Sixth Street**, an absolute must for at least a people-watching walk (*though locals call it "Dirty Sixth" for a reason*).

For dinner, head to Manuel's down the street for upscale and authentic Mexican food. Or, for a more intimate dinner – and drinks – head to Townsend, a beautiful cocktail lounge with a mid-century vibe and a small listening room in the back where live music plays almost every night.

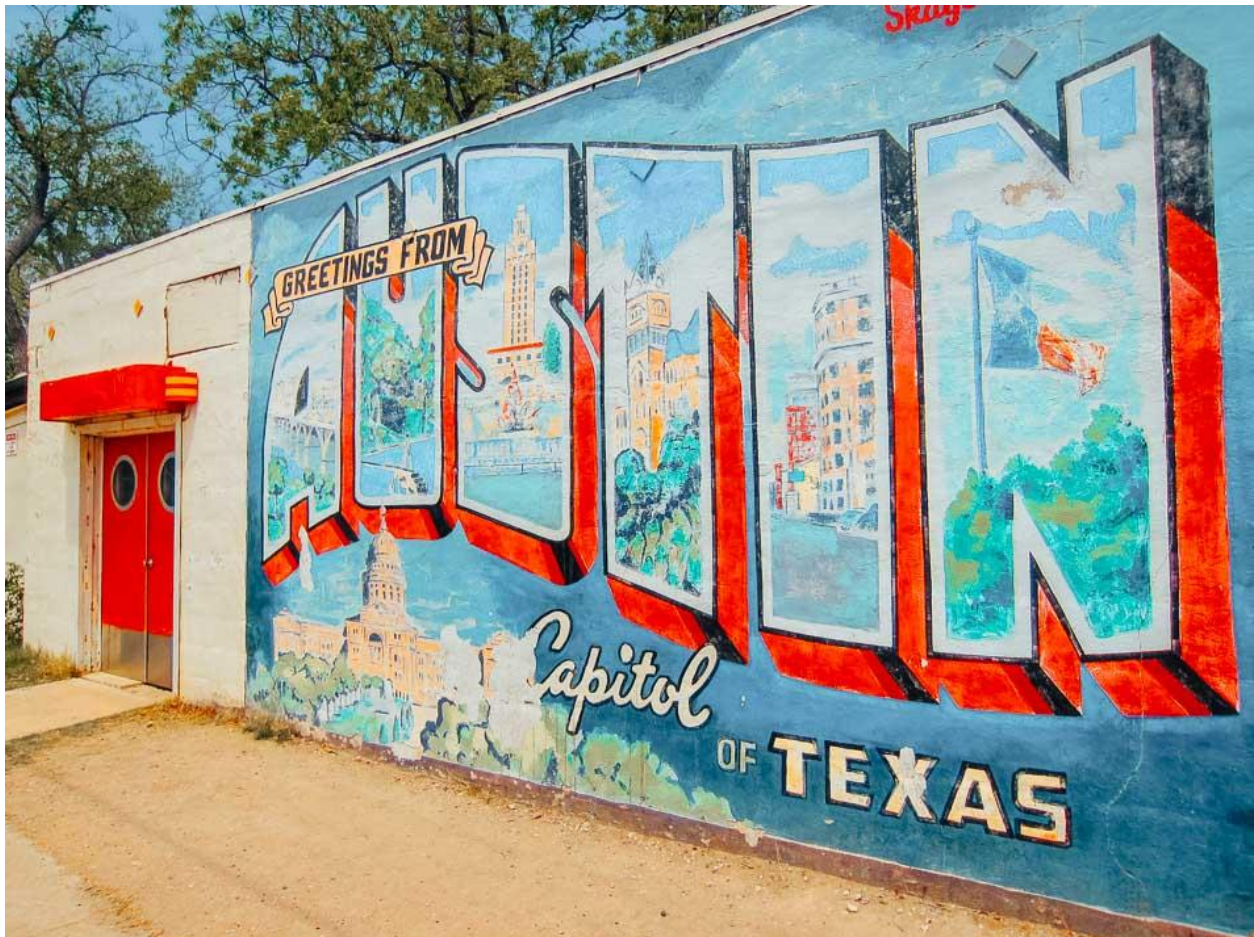
Afterwards, catch some live music at an authentic local standby: Antone's, a club pulsing with energy where musicians from Stevie Ray Vaughan to B.B. King have taken the stage. Also, fun fact: Kathy Valentine of The Go-Go's is an owner-investor and the music program consultant.

AUSTIN ITINERARY: DAY 3

Today's the day to explore the artistic hipster haven of East Austin, chock-full of restaurants, craft brewpubs, vintage shops, and coffee houses. You're in my home neighborhood now, and the hardest decision to make is where to go! But before you start exploring, it's important to note that East Austin wasn't always the colorful, mural-splashed, Instagrammable hotspot it is today.

For over a century, East Austin was a center for Black culture, one of the few in the state of Texas. The city's oldest university was founded here in 1877, and the historically Black university provided higher education for freed slaves after the Civil War. In the 50's and 60's, East Austin – especially around 11th street – was a thriving business and entertainment district for the city's Black residents, not unlike Beale Street in Memphis. Today, this important and historic area is a prime example of gentrification and urban renewal – read the full history here. Thankfully, the heritage and history of the area, which has the unique distinction of being the only Black cultural district in Texas, is being preserved by the Six Square Cultural District in Central East Austin, a nonprofit organization working to highlight the achievements of local African Americans while educating the population about our painful history.

As you explore East Austin, let that context frame your experience as you explore both the old and the new in East Austin.



One of the iconic street art murals near East Sixth Street in East Austin, Texas.

EXPLORE EAST SIXTH STREET

Cesar Chavez and East Sixth Street are both highly walkable and bikeable thoroughfares that are lined with colorful murals, wacky yard art, food trucks, vintage shops and working artist galleries where you can often see makers in motion. You'll be spending today exploring the area!

For breakfast or brunch, I recommend Counter Cafe, a laid-back diner with some of the best eggs benedict and steak-and-eggs in town. Then, it's time to wander. Explore! Roam (*if you want to*)! Here are a few suggestions to guide your wanderings:

- **Street Art:** Austin has fantastic street art, and you'll see it all around East Sixth St. There are plenty of detailed guides to Austin's street art, like this colorful wall guide (*with over 80 walls!*), this "Instagrammable" photo op guide, and this mapped-out guide. But we recommend this self-guided mural tour of East Austin created by the Six Square Cultural District, which highlights meaningful murals that speak to the soul and history of the neighborhood.
- **Breweries:** Austin is famous for its craft beer – we've got over 65 craft breweries in town, and that number keeps on growing. *Yes, we are #blessed*. In this part of town, you can walk to 4 of them: Zilker Brewing, Lazarus Brewing, Blue Owl Brewing, and Hops & Grain. Or, book a guided tour: this brewery walking tour in East Austin takes you to 4 local East Austin hot-spots with plenty of history and local insight along the way. Check out this East Austin brewery guide on Big World Small Girl for more brewery suggestions!
- **Cultural Heritage:** If you're looking for the original flavor of East Austin, you'll find it in Central East Austin and just south of Sixth Street in East Cesar Chavez. Visit the George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center to learn about Black culture in Austin and the celebration of Juneteenth – admission is free! Here's a guide to a few more places of historical note in Central East Austin. I also recommend the Tejano Walking Trail, a 5 mile self-guided walking or biking trail that features 22 culturally significant sites. This area was historically home to Austin's Hispanic residents, many of whom were displaced by urban development, and the trail preserves these neighborhood treasures despite the onslaught of gentrification.

Self-Guided History Tours: Preservation Austin has a free *Historic Austin Tours* series available through the Otocast app! These self-guided audio-visual tours explore the city's heritage through narrated histories and historic photographs. I recommend the **East Sixth Street Tour**, including the Driskill Hotel and Alamo Ritz, or the **African American Austin tour**. (*There's also a Congress Avenue tour!*)

You'll be spending all day exploring, which means you're gonna get hungry for lunch – and I know just the place. Besides breakfast tacos, Austin is known for its barbecue. While Franklin's is the most well-known, lines are often hours long and they're usually sold out by 11 am.

But equally as good is my go-to, La Barbecue, run by LeAnn Mueller of the Mueller "barbecue royalty" family. Try their mouth-watering Central Texas-style smoked brisket or ribs, all home-smoked in a custom-built smoker. The restaurant is located in the Quickie Pickie store and cafe — you'll thank me later.

Travel Tip: If you're here on a Sunday, the HOPE Farmers Market is always fun, featuring live music, and yoga along and kid's activities as well as a selection of farmer's stalls and prepared food vendors. If you happen to visit Austin in November, check out the East Austin Studio tour which happens over two weekends and invites the public into creative spaces to interact with the work of more than 1,000 artists.

OPTION 1: HIT UP A HONKY-TONK

The nightlife scene in East Austin is lively, with every block in the neighborhood boasting several spots. If you can stay out on East Sixth Street all day and make it into the evening, you'll be rewarded with a uniquely Texan experience. Head over to the White Horse to get your Texas honky-tonk on. There is live music and dancing every night of the week, from rockabilly and swing to blues and rock, and even dance lessons if you want. The vibe is hot and the drinks are cheap. This place is as Austin as it gets!

When you're ready to wind down, my absolute favorite cocktail lounge is Ah Sing Den, named for Charles Dickens' favorite London opium den and run by a mother and daughter team. Grab an aperitif and a small plate and, if you're lucky, enjoy some more live music!

OPTION 2: MEET SOME GHOSTS

If three days of drinking and dancing in a row sounds like a bit much (*Note from Lia: what up my over 30 crowd, hayyy y'all*), take an afternoon siesta and then – when it's nice and dark – emerge from your lair to meet some of Austin's resident spooks.

No, I'm not talking about the bats. They are adorable and fuzzy and not at all scary. Plus, you already met them! Nope, we're talking literal ghosts. Murderous ghosts, at that! Intrigued? Terrified!? *Little Column A, little Column B?*

On this haunted walking tour of Austin, you'll hear the historical tales of murder and mayhem that helped make Austin weird. You'll explore Austin on foot with an acclaimed storyteller – and a small group – and see all of Austin's supernatural nooks and creepy crannies, including a tour of the famous Driskill Hotel. If your idea of a nightcap is a glass of wine and an episode of My Favorite Murder, take this true-crime walking tour of Austin, aka **Murder Walk** (*ooh, sounds fun*)!

Just listen to this description: "In the year 1885 America's first serial killer stalked the streets and alleyways of the young, emerging city of Austin. More terrifying than any ghost story, this monster brutally and systematically hacked eight women to death using an ax. For one calendar year, he terrified a city and came to be known as the "midnight assassin". He was never captured and his identity remains a mystery or does it...?" Um, does anyone else have *chills*? The tour covers 2 miles of historic Austin including West 6th street, Guy Town, the Warehouse District and the iconic Driskill Hotel as you learn all about the theories surrounding the mystery of the midnight assassin.

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