



Cruel and Stupid? - Take Two

How Our Healthcare System Affects Doctors and Patients

Featuring Dr. Ron Birnbaum, Dr. Paul Song and
Dr. James G. Khan

IN THIS EPISODE

In celebration of our first 100 Code WACK! episodes, we're revisiting one of our very first - *and most disturbing* - podcasts. It's about how our 'wack' healthcare system, with its confusing mess of various insurance plans, treats patients very differently depending on who pays the claims. **Tragically, it's as relevant today as ever!** Guests **Dr. Ron Birnbaum** and **Dr. Paul Y. Song** reveal to host **Brenda Gazzar** the problems patients and doctors face due to our multi-payer health insurance scheme, and some potentially life-threatening hassles that are common health insurance industry practices. And **Dr. James G. Kahn** explains just how much money the average American family is paying each year for our ultra-complicated healthcare system. *(It's a shocker!)*

SHOW NOTES

WE DISCUSS

What makes our healthcare system so difficult for doctors?

"...every single person who comes through the door...what you can do and what you can't do...and how you do it...and who you have to ask for approval...is different and that can change over time with the same person." – *Dr. Ron Birnbaum*

Give one example of how health insurers harm patients.

“...the private insurance industry is purposely carrying out denials with the hope that it's just so painful that most patients or doctors won't take the time to fight the denial, and if they do and they win, well, *'we'll pay it out but we will have kept the money for several months and have had the interest on that.'*” – Dr. Paul Song

How much extra does the U.S. pay to have a multi-payer system?

“...about 12% of all our healthcare spending goes to extra costs associated with juggling all of these different payers...that's about \$1,400 per person, per year. That means a family of four is spending close to \$6,000 on unnecessary paperwork every year.” – Dr. James G. Kahn

Helpful Links

[Cal-Care, AB 1400](#), Guaranteed Health Care for All Act

[Is Our Healthcare System Broken?](#), Harvard Health Publishing

[66% of Americans fear they won't be able to afford health care this year](#), CNBC

[Prior Authorization and Step Therapy](#), State Action for COVID-19, American Medical Association Advocacy Resource Center

Episode Transcript

Read the full episode [transcript](#).

Guest Biographies

[Ron Birnbaum, MD, \(Dermatology\)](#)

Assistant Professor of Family Medicine
USC Eisner Family Practice Residency at California Hospital

[Paul Y. Song, MD, \(Radiation Oncologist\)](#)

President, Physicians for a National Health Program - California
Formerly of the Samuel Oschin Cancer Center at Cedars Sinai Medical Center and a previous volunteer physician at Dignity California Hospital where he saw Medicaid and uninsured patients.

[James G. Kahn, MD/MPH](#)

Health Economist, Institute for Health Policy Studies
Professor emeritus, University of California San Francisco

Get Involved / Take Action

[Join the CalCare Campaign](#) (National Nurses United) *to join the fight for single payer and AB1400, the Guaranteed Health Care for All Act*

[Subscribe to HEAL California](#) *for health policy news with a California focus*

[Join Health Care for All California](#) *to keep up with local actions to support California single-payer health care.*

[Join Healthy California Now](#) *- a coalition working toward a California single-payer system. Individual and organizational membership available*

[Join Physicians for a National Health Program](#) (PNHP) *to join the national campaign to improve and expand Medicare to all residents of the U.S.*