

# Who are the 'Big Six' taking over America's health care?



## IN THIS EPISODE

What's the healthcare industry been up to since winning passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010? ***Are mergers, acquisitions and industry consolidation improving care for patients?*** Who are the “Big Six” healthcare corporations and how are they faring? Join host **Brenda Gazzar** and guest **Wendell Potter**, co-founder of Business Leaders for Health Care Transformation, for these answers and more! Potter, former VP of corporate communications at CIGNA and insurance industry whistleblower, is a New York Times bestselling author. ***Tune in to this first of two podcast episodes to get the facts about corporate health care's latest business strategies and what they may mean for the rest of us.***

## SHOW NOTES

## WE DISCUSS

## ***What's the deal with all the mergers and acquisitions in the healthcare industry?***

“The industry absolutely is consolidating...Not only have they been buying smaller competitors, they have been engaging in what's referred to as vertical integration. Big insurance companies have been merging with big pharmacy benefit management companies in recent years...Since the Affordable Care Act has passed, they've grown so much that their revenues have quadrupled and their profits have grown from something like \$12 billion in 2010 to over \$60 billion dollars last year. So these companies have become massive, massive companies.” – **Wendell Potter**

## ***Why should we worry about this?***

“...as they bulk up, they are more and more in control of our healthcare system. They are not only insurers...They've been buying up physician practices...So they will be able to control - *and already are controlling* - not only our health insurance, but steering us to providers that they own and/or operate. So that's one concern. The other is that...they have more money to spend, to influence public opinion, to lie to us, essentially, and to influence public policy and campaigns. They spend huge, huge sums of money, more than they ever had before because they have more of it, to influence the outcome of elections and the outcome of public policy.” – **Wendell Potter**

## ***How much does the U.S. (including individuals, businesses and the government) spend on health care now, and how does that translate into political influence?***

We spend...about \$4.3 trillion all together on health care in this country...about one of every \$4 of that now flows through just...six companies. Their total revenues last year totaled to \$1.1 trillion...They take a chunk of that to convert to profits, to reward their shareholders and their top executives, and to have a big bucket of money to spend on propaganda and campaign contributions and lobbying.” – **Wendell Potter**

# Helpful Links

[Business Leaders for Healthcare Transformation](#)

[A decade-long look at how Big Insurance profiteers American taxpayers and the sick](#)

*Wendell Potter*

[Meet This Year's Healthcare Billionaires](#)

*MedPage Today, 2022*

[The ACA: Trillions? Yes. A Revolution? No.](#)

*Health Affairs*

## Episode Transcript

Read the full [episode transcript](#).

## Wendell Potter Biography

Wendell has more than four decades of experience as a communications professional, going back to his teenage years in Tennessee, where he served as a high school correspondent to his hometown paper, The Kingsport Times-News. His journalism career would later take him to Memphis, Nashville, and finally Washington, D.C., where he covered Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court for Scripps-Howard Newspapers.

Although best known for his career in corporate public relations, Wendell has also served as press secretary to a Tennessee gubernatorial candidate, head of advertising

and PR for a large integrated health care system in East Tennessee, a partner in an Atlanta public relations firm, and a state and federal lobbyist.

His first corporate job was at Humana Inc., where he headed the company's communications department in Louisville, Kentucky. From there he was recruited to Cigna Corporation, where he served in a variety of positions over nearly 15 years in the company's Bloomfield, Connecticut, and Philadelphia offices. His responsibilities included leading the company's corporate communications team and serving as chief corporate spokesperson. He also represented Cigna on several industry committees and task forces, including the strategic communications committee at the industry's largest PR and lobbying group, America's Health Insurance Plans.

After seeing firsthand how strategic PR and lobbying is used unfairly to tilt the scales toward corporate interests against the people's interests, Wendell left his corporate career to advocate for meaningful health care reform. He made headlines in 2009 when he disclosed in Congressional testimony how insurance companies, as part of their efforts to boost profits, have contributed to spiraling healthcare costs and the growing number of Americans without health insurance. He also revealed how insurance companies use their customers' premiums to wage multi-million dollar PR and lobbying campaigns to influence public opinion and public policy. Since then, he has spoken at more than 200 public forums and authored the award-winning book, [\*Deadly Spin, An Insurance Company Insider Speaks Out on How Corporate PR Is Killing Health Care and Deceiving Americans\*](#). His latest offering is an eBook entitled, [\*Obamacare: What's in for Me? What Everyone Needs to Know about the Affordable Care Act\*](#).

Previously, Wendell was a columnist for The Center for Public Integrity, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that produces original investigative journalism. His articles and commentaries have appeared in many publications including The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Tampa Bay Times, The Guardian, Newsweek, The Nation, Huffington Post, CNN.com, NBC.com, Democracy Journal, and [healthinsurance.org](http://healthinsurance.org). Wendell has been the subject of numerous articles in the U.S. and foreign media, including The New York Times and The Washington Post, and has appeared frequently as a guest on ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX News Channel, MSNBC, PBS, and NPR.

In 2017, Wendell launched Tarbell.org, a non-partisan news publication with the mission is to provide objective, investigative reporting on hard hitting topics affecting Americans.

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

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