

How Big Pharma makes a killing on patients' suffering



IN THIS EPISODE

What happens when the cost of surviving an illness is so high, *it's simply out of reach*? How does Big Pharma enjoy such outsized profits from cancer and other treatments? And what about patients who are stuck between a pharmaceutical company and their health insurer?

To find out, we spoke to **Dr. David Leibowitz**, hematologist-oncologist and incoming chair of [Physicians for a National Health Program - California](#), a non-partisan voluntary organization that supports equitable access to high quality health care as a right to all people. ***What's on his agenda for the California state chapter?***

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WE DISCUSS

Did seeing patients more often affect your understanding of the challenges they face as they cope with cancer?

"Absolutely. Because even having a clinic, you don't quite get the exposure to the problems people have paying for things and that's a big problem for a lot of people." – **David Leibowitz, MD**

I can imagine that drug companies wouldn't want a generic version of a medication because they'll miss out on a great deal of money.

"It's not that uncommon that they buy the company that is making the generic and then one of two things can happen. They may continue making the generic with the company they bought or in some cases they shut down the company and so there is no generic available. – **David Leibowitz, MD**

And what about health insurers who won't cover certain medications?

"...a lot of times the insurance *could* cover the medication if it chose to, and that gets into the whole story about authorization and preauthorization and the ways in which health insurance companies control what doctors are allowed to do in their practice. And that actually is becoming a major issue

because today 60% to 70% of physicians are employed. They no longer have their own little independent practice. They're now employed by hospitals or healthcare corporations. And the really sad part is that many of those healthcare companies are being purchased by private equity firms. So before they were purchased, they were for profit companies. After they're purchased by private equity, there's really no kind of pretense that they have a benevolent motivation because private equity is strictly dedicated to taking as much money out of a company as possible." – **David Leibowitz, MD**

Helpful Links

[Physicians for a National Health Program - California](#)

[Medicare Coverage of Cancer Treatment Services](#), *Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services*

[Killing Innovation in the Pharmaceutical Industry](#), *Think at London Business School*

[Big Pharma's Dirty Tricks](#), *Down to Earth*

[6 things Big Pharma doesn't want you to know!](#), *Medecins Sans Frontieres*

[Even If Insured, People with Advanced Cancer Often Face Financial Problems](#), *NIH - National Cancer Institute*

[What If Insurance Won't Pay?](#), *Carcinoid Cancer Foundation and Laurie Todd, "The Insurance Warrior"*

Episode Transcript

Read the full episode [transcript](#).

Biography: David Leibowitz, MD

Dr. David Leibowitz is the incoming Chair of the [California chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program](#).

Dr. Leibowitz's career had two parts, first roughly 20 years doing research, and then 20 years practicing hematology-oncology.

He was outraged by the expense of new cancer drugs and the profit-taking by oncologists, insurance companies, and drug companies. He joined PNHP in 2017 to help remake the US healthcare system.

Click for his complete [Curriculum Vitae](#).

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