



## Marble lobbies & grand pianos: How America's nonprofit hospitals make bank

*Featuring Sandra Alvarez*

### IN THIS EPISODE

This time on **Code WACK!** When it comes to our broken healthcare system, **are nonprofit hospitals part of the solution ... *or part of the problem?*** What are their priorities? How do their actions affect patient care?

To find out, we spoke to filmmaker [Sandra Alvarez](#), director of the new documentary [InHospitable](#), which tells the story of patients and advocates as they **fight for their lives and take on a billion dollar hospital system**. This is the first of two episodes with Sandra about her film InHospitable.

### SHOW NOTES

# WE DISCUSS

*While working on InHospitable, what was one of your biggest surprises?*

"I don't think it's shocking to anybody in this country that, you know, we have decided as a country that we are going to have private companies, corporations. running our health care, and that there is a focus on profit and there's a focus on the business aspect of it.

But I think, to me, what was the most surprising was the non-profit hospital side.

...these were hospitals where they had gleaming huge lobbies and grand pianos and marble lobbies and art. And it was just really interesting to me trying to figure out, okay, where is all the money going that we're paying these nonprofits and, and what are they doing to provide for their community, which of course is the main reason that they get these tax breaks and these tax benefits." - **Sandra Alvarez**

*Are community investments (such as tax breaks) in nonprofit hospitals paying off?*

"As far as the experts I interviewed and the community advocates and, you know, community leaders, everyone that I was speaking to, I kept hearing the same thing, which was they're not doing enough to have these huge, huge tax breaks, not paying property taxes while the schools across the street are crumbling and rat infested and the streets have potholes and cracks, the same streets that are right in front of the hospital." - **Sandra Alvarez**

## *What was the issue with the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center?*

“UPMC had declared that they would no longer be accepting Highmark insurance and so that blocked a lot of people.

And you know, of course UPMC would say, ‘Well, just change insurance. You can have UPMC insurance, you can have Aetna, you can have whatever you want. Just don't...you know, seek treatment at UPMC... you shouldn't have Highmark.’

And of course, that wasn't a reality for a lot of people who get their insurance through their employers or have a specific Medicare Advantage program, and it would just be way too expensive to switch from their Highmark insurance.” – **Sandra Alvarez**

## *Why did you focus so intently on patient stories?*

“...that was a real goal for me especially cuz I don't come from the healthcare policy side, I just realized, you know, this is something that we really have to humanize because it is so complicated. <Laugh>... You have this background, but for me, oh my gosh, it was just so complicated. I feel like it's on par with the ... U.S. tax code.

So...it was really about trying to find that balance of explaining just enough in the film about the inner workings of what's happening in the system and with the human stories and how it's really impacting people.” – **Sandra Alvarez**

# Helpful Links

[InHospitable](#), *Sandra Alvarez, Director*

[When nonprofit hospitals start acting like for-profits](#), *The Lown Institute*

[How Hospital Consolidation Hurts Americans](#), *America's Health Insurance Plans*

[Biden's FTC Has Blocked 4 Hospital Mergers and Is Poised to Thwart More Consolidation Attempts](#), *Kaiser Health News*

[The Nonprofit Hospital That Makes Millions, Owns a Collection Agency and Relentlessly Sues the Poor](#), *Propublica*

[Highmark vs. UPMC: The saga continues](#), *Fierce Healthcare*

[Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. UPMC and Highmark: State AG Prevails with 10-Year Consent Decree After Long Bitter Court Battle](#), *The Source on Healthcare Price & Competition*

[Federal judge grants final approval of \\$575M settlement against Sutter Health](#), *Fierce Healthcare*

# Episode Transcript

*Read the full [episode transcript](#).*

## Biography: Sandra Alvarez

Sandra has spent her career directing and producing a wide spectrum of documentary and television programs appearing on CNN, Netflix, Sundance Channel, History Channel, BBC America, A&E Network and Discovery Channel.

Her recent documentary, [InHospitable](#), documents patients and advocates as they fight for their lives and take on a billion-dollar hospital system.

Her previous work includes serving as one of the directors of the Netflix original documentary series HOT GIRLS WANTED: TURNED ON, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. She served as a producer for CNN's documentary series THE NINETIES and THE HISTORY OF COMEDY.

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