



## 'Absolutely bonkers': The hassles doctors face in treating patients

**“Think of the time that doctors could be spending administering care and getting to know their patients as opposed to sitting on the phone with some college kid who doesn't know what they're talking about and has a quota.” – Maddy Purves**

*911. What's your emergency?*

*America's healthcare system is broken and people are dying.*

Welcome to **Code WACK!**, where we shine a light on America's callous healthcare system, how it hurts us and what we can do about it. I'm your host **Brenda Gazzar**.

*(music)*

This time on **Code WACK!** Why are doctors so frustrated with our current healthcare system? And why doesn't free market capitalism work with health care? To find out, we spoke to documentary filmmaker **Maddy Purves**, who is film editor of the documentary *Healing US* narrated by **Susan Sarandon**, and **Laura Fielding**, founder of [Red Berets Medicare for All](#) and associate producer of *Healing US*. This is the second episode in a two-part series.

***Q: Welcome back to Code WACK! Maddy and Laura! Last time we spoke about how our callous healthcare system wears patients down and even puts their lives at risk. But doctors are equally frustrated. Dr. Victoria Dooley, a leading voice for healthcare justice, mentions in the film that she's had to beg insurance***

***companies to cover things like MRIs or CAT scans for her patients. What do you guys think about that?***

**Purves:** It is absolutely bonkers. I know how to pronounce maybe a few things in the medical world and one of the things that Dr. Dooley says when she's on the phone is that these people she's on the phone with also don't know how to pronounce medical terms because they've never had a medical terminology course. ... I love the way she speaks. She's also incredibly brilliant and she's a doctor and she's sitting on the phone. She's spending her days on the phone with people who have no idea what they're talking about, and they have their own quotas and they're probably getting paid not enough to be doing the job that they're doing, which is tedious, just so that they can go through their little checkbox – I love the way that Dr. Dooley says that too – and essentially try to stumble up this doctor so that they can say, 'aha, we're going to deny your claim. We're going to deny this.' That's just so easy to just despise...

It's a simple, but again, totally just descriptive example of how our healthcare system runs. It's backwards, <laugh> think of the time that doctors could be spending administering care and getting to know their patients as opposed to sitting on the phone with some college kid who doesn't know what they're talking about <laugh> and has a quota.

**Q: Right, thank you Maddy and it's scary to think that these decisions are being made by people who don't really understand medicine or health care.**

**Fielding:** I also think it's important that we really begin to look at, face and talk about the emotional burden that we as a society and that our for-profit predatory system places on the shoulders, and the hearts and the daily time factor that we were just talking about upon our caregivers, our doctors and our nurses. That's the thing that strikes me every time is most of them, presumably maybe all got into the profession to provide care, to heal and to care for their patients and meanwhile they go in, and it's hard to imagine the ones that are in touch with and I don't mean to say the ones, but presumably there must be people that just sort of armor up or do what they can because if they were emotionally facing the injustices of our systems as they're forced to try to function and provide the best care that they can in this absolutely heinous cruel system, I just think that that in itself is an abhorrent and atrocious reality to face is the emotional burden that we place on our healers, people that we're relying on to heal us. That breaks my heart.

***Q: Yes, thank you Laura. It was also really interesting to me to hear Wendell Potter who's a former health insurance industry communications executive, and Dr. Joseph Jarvis, who I had never heard speak before and really loved his voice – he recently ran for Congress in Utah – argue that free market capitalism doesn't work with health care. Do you agree with them? And if so, why?***

**Purves:** I love this point because I have some personal context to it. My dad is an insurance agent and is transitioning in his career to mostly personal lines, which is home and auto, which is the stuff that, you know, it makes sense why we have car insurance. It's one of those things we gamble with, with capitalism. We live in a capitalist world and I was able to convert my father because of this point, and that's why this <laugh>, you know, sometimes like we talk about in audiences that what they say is their favorite part – quote unquote – depends on who they are. And with a lot of bleeding hearts, it's the stories and that's what gets me too is, you know, I'm a storyteller. That's what I thrive off of. For a lot of the other spectrum of political people, for a lot of the other half of America, the point that sells them is explaining a free market and explaining how health care does not qualify.

We are conditioned as Americans to fear the phrase socialized medicine. 'We don't want to be like Canada <laugh>, Heaven forbid we're like Britain. We are so different.' So we had to very clearly outline capitalism and a free market and why health care doesn't work there. So Dr. Jarvis, who I very much love and who if you haven't heard before is definitely a huge part of the new Common Sense for health care in Utah and is one of the strongest voices for single payer out there. And I'm a huge advocate of his but in the film, Dr. Jarvis goes over the four main pillars of a free market as originally outlined in 1776.

Adam Smith, A Wealth of Nations. Each of the four pillars are, let's see if I can remember them. Buyer beware. A buyer must be all knowing. They have to know what option they will most likely pick based on the market that is out there of tons of options. Obviously in health care, that doesn't apply. As a buyer quote or whatever as a consumer of health care, if you will. I don't really know my options <laugh>, that's why I go to a doctor so I can say, 'Hey, what's my problem? And then give me a solution 'cause I don't know <laugh>' Anyway, so that one's crossed off. Second, and maybe this is pointless for me to regurgitate all four pillars, but anyway, the film captures that and health care is just not a capitalist thing. We all have a need. There is no risk, right, of potentially maybe getting sick someday. We are just going to get sick. There's no risk of maybe dying someday. We all die. We all need food and water. So along those lines, please watch our film and <laugh> listen to Dr. Jarvis tell it 'cause I certainly can't.

**Fielding:** Yes of course I agree that free markets and capitalism do not work in health care and also could sing Dr. Jarvis' praises forever. One little tidbit interesting for people to know about Dr. Jarvis was that he was originally many many years ago he was on the board of PNHP. So people may get the impression that he does so much states' advocacy but really he has worked on all fronts on this for decades and as Maddy has already alluded to written books and lobbied legislators and literally just tried every single avenue to make single payer a reality.

**And PNHP stands for Physicians for a National Health program. It's a single-payer advocacy organization made up of doctors, medical students and other health professionals.**

**Fielding:** Love Dr. Jarvis. What I particularly love about his voice in Healing US is we already have as Maddy mentioned the bleeding hearts – or not to put people on the political spectrum but we know who's out there cheerleading for us. We know the section of voters who as Brihanna Joy Gray says 'already on board, the stage is set.' We know those people that are 100 percent in for this. But when I am speaking with people who are very, very skeptical or maybe have listened to media propaganda for a long time, I feel that Dr. Jarvis' voice is particularly profoundly important because it's those people who we also need to reach. We need to reach people who have those arguments or those skepticisms or what they've been taught so his voice is so important and I love so much that he's in this film.

***Q: Yes I agree 100 percent. So what policy solutions does the film Healing US advocate for and why?***

**Purves:** This is one of the main reasons why I would love for more and more people to watch the film and then to carry the torch on from here because there are many options for how to move forward. We just need all the people who know what they're talking about to get in the same room and to start on the same level in terms of policy. A few weeks ago we had a screening at San Jose State University, which was awesome. A lot of cool students there, hopefully new converts. And so was also representative Ash Kalra in California who is one author of one bill <laugh> or has been in California's history of a single-payer bill in California – of CalCare. And essentially, I don't know the deets, but we just need to kind of transition.

And right now a lot of people are talking about different potential options like a tax write off for businesses or something that offer a different plan and to me that is all red herring. The only way forward I think is a single-payer future wherein the government is the sole payer of health care. See, you can hear my lack of

vocabulary. I'm a filmmaker and this is where we need the policy makers to come in and say, 'this is how we can make this happen but essentially the policy is there, there are bills in circulation, not only in California, but in other states. Washington has held the torch for a long time, so has Colorado.

And what I think and what I'm passionate about now that the film is done and my favorite part is done of making the film, is using our film and what we've created called the Healing Us Network, which is an interstate connective network of people who are all working in their own counties, cities, and states to get a state-based policy movement going to get them all working together 'cause CalCare, frankly, the bill is pretty solid. It just needs support. And there's a great example in Colorado, a few years back, there was a single-payer bill up on the market, and the number discrepancy of for single payer and anti-single payer is just ginormous. It's something like \$800,000 in the for-universal healthcare front versus \$8 million on the for-profit healthcare front. So our idea is just to continue to get people to, you know, obviously, watch the film so they have a starting point and then to talk to each other across states and say, what are you doing?

The idea is that if we all work together at the same time, we can spread the resources of the opposition so that if we launch the campaigns together, and in all different states, Colorado, Washington, California, Oregon, but also Massachusetts Washington, DC, New York, Florida, Ohio, Illinois, all these states have powerhouses. It just means that we need to kind of work together in, in our own states together as different states in order to get policy that is sound in each, you know. We have to kind of talk to each other. What's working in your state and what's working in mine. That's the strategy is to just talk with each other.

***Q: Yeah, yeah, that's a great idea. Do you know Maddy if that has already started, like the talking? I mean, are you using Healing US as a platform to do that? Or is it happening already outside of your platform?***

**Purves:** It is happening outside our platform and also though we see a need for more, that's why we kind of thought of inventing this network was because we have an interstate audience. You know, everybody can watch a film online and say, how do I get involved? So we created this platform to be a central hub for people to go after they watch the film, kind of, you know, inspired by An Inconvenient Truth, right? The lack there was, what do I do now, <laugh>, nothing, no. Well, here, what do I do now after watching this movie and I'm inspired? I want to be a healthcare advocate. Go to our website and see what's in my state, what's local, how do I join? We are piggybacking off of the already built networks in states and nationally. PNHP

is a great example of an organization that already has a national audience, quote unquote, that's my filmmaker term for a group of advocates.

2024 is going to be a fascinating political year. Get interested and see what candidates are for single payer. We are developing a relationship with one candidate and we want to develop relationships with many candidates. We're very excited about Dr. (Cornel) West. We're also very excited about the Green Party, and I believe those two have split, but we don't care. We're on both teams. <Laugh>. If there's a Democratic candidate in a state that is for single payer, join us and join the fight. Wear a red beret and talk about how single payer in your state is going to be on your platform.

If you're interested in politics, talk about health care. I mean it's relevant now more than it will ever be, and it will just continue to get more and more relevant as issues of womens' bodies come stronger than ever in some states. And frankly there are organizations that just need to kind of commit. CalCare has many friends. What if the friends of CalCare joined the friends of Whole Washington? That is the idea. So we're doing it. Join us. And if you know of somebody in your state that is a local chapter of a larger thing, contact us and let's add to the party.

**Fielding:** Of course, you know, and thank you Code WACK! because you were one of the first people to sign aboard and say, absolutely, we'd love to be in partnership. We do want to say that if you visit [HealingUSNetwork.com](https://HealingUSNetwork.com) and you don't see yourself or an organization that you volunteer or strongly advocate with and for, if you don't see yourselves up on [HealingUSNetwork](https://HealingUSNetwork.com), that's not because you're not invited. Please reach out. Please be a part of the network. Because again, the idea is that when people see the film, wherever you are, you should be able to go to [HealingUSNetwork.com](https://HealingUSNetwork.com) and be like, somebody maybe was in Washington state and even though we've done a lot of advocacy, they may not yet know about Whole Washington.

Well, after the film, they will, you know, but in a state maybe that has not as much going on they can go to [HealingUSNetwork](https://HealingUSNetwork.com) and find out how to get involved. And then, you know, the other thing too is just I do want to bring up the craft again and say it's a beautiful thing to have the art, the film itself is art and because we talk so much about policy and policy is extremely important because it's how we're going to get the thing done and it is also the case that we need all kinds of people in this movement. It tends to turn people away when we focus only on policy. Some people just turn off. They're creative minded or they're overwhelmed by the details of the policy or the infighting that they see happening with people arguing about which bill is better and which strategy is better.

We have to mention again that everybody is welcome on The Healing Us Network. It doesn't matter if you're advocating for your city council or for your state level, or for always, always national Improved Medicare for all or if you do activism on all of those fronts or if you do activism on only one of those fronts and disagree with the others, you are still welcome at Healingusnetwork.com because we are a collective. We are thousands and thousands and millions of stitches in a red beret. That's what connects us is our heart and our hands and our actions and so it's really important to shout out and to reach out to people who maybe aren't as policy minded or that's not going to be their focus, but they're creative. Whether it's that you knit or crochet or do filmmaking or some other modality, please just hopefully be inspired and invited to know that your way can contribute to the holistic picture of getting health care.

Thank you Maddy Purves and Laura Fielding of the Healing US documentary.

***Do you have a personal story you'd like to share about our 'wack' healthcare system? Contact us through our website at [heal-ca.org](http://heal-ca.org).***

***And don't forget to subscribe to Code WACK! wherever you find your podcasts. You can also find us on [ProgressiveVoices.com](http://ProgressiveVoices.com) and on Nurse Talk Media.***

***Code WACK!'s powered by HEAL California, uplifting the voices of those fighting for healthcare reform around the country. I'm Brenda Gazzar.***