

## Can veterans really get better care outside the VA?

featuring *Wendell Potter*,  
[Health Care, un-covered](#)  
[Substack](#)



## *This time on Code WACK!*

How is the **Department of Veterans Affairs** becoming increasingly privatized and what could this mean for those who have served and sacrificed for our country? ***Is corporate health insurance better than the VA healthcare system - or not?*** How is privatization affecting the financial viability of the VA -- and what can be done to stop it?

To find out, we recently spoke to **Wendell Potter**, a former health insurance industry executive turned whistleblower, the New York Times bestselling author of [Deadly Spin](#) and the president of the [Center for Health and Democracy](#). He's also the author of the Substack newsletter [HEALTH CARE un-covered](#) where he recently penned a post entitled "[Privatizing the VA: The Unseen Costs to Veterans and Taxpayers Alike.](#)"

Check out the [Transcript](#) and Show Notes for more!

## **SHOW NOTES**

# WE DISCUSS

*Medicare and Medicaid are not the only public insurance programs that are being privatized. Even Veterans Administration healthcare programs are being affected by privatization. What's behind that? And what about costs?*

"The VA's hospitals and the doctors ... have really served our vets very well over many years. There have been some issues over recent years in which we've seen some published reports in which there was not enough capacity and the hospitals were not as resourced as they should be. What we saw as a consequence was legislation that was passed that created privatization of the VA, not total but creeping privatization, and we're seeing more and more evidence that that was misguided.

"Whenever you bring private insurers and private facilities into the mix, you're going to be adding to the cost because ... insurers in particular ... are going to be seeking as much profit from the VA as they possibly can get.

Sadly, there's just this misplaced belief that the private sector can do a better job than the government in anything and that includes health care and it includes the VA system. Again, it was a reaction to adverse publicity about the VA, but it was misguided and has led to even greater expense and more problems [for] veterans than would otherwise have been the case.

"What should have been a ... more prudent response is for the federal government to provide additional funding to the VA to alleviate any backlogs or any problems that they have, rather than inviting private insurance companies into the program...." - **Wendell Potter**

## ***What about the impact on veterans' quality of care and health outcomes?***

"We're finding that if a veteran accesses the private system, they're subjected to the same restrictions that people who are not veterans often encounter. That means that often [their] doctors are second guessed. They may not get the care that their doctor says they need, or it could be delayed, or they could have to pay a lot of money out of their own pockets if they urgently need something and they're facing this delay.

"A lot of people don't realize they have the right to appeal a denial, but sadly - because people don't understand their rights or think it will be too time consuming, they don't know how to go about it or [they think] it'll be futile - they just don't give it a try.

"And so consequently, a lot of people, and now including veterans, are not getting the care that they need. They're not appealing denials and they're going without the care that they need, or they're saying, 'I'll just try to pay out of pocket or figure out how I can get the care that I need.' And so it's a horrible situation for a lot of the vets who've accessed the private sector for care. When they could be eligible [for care], if they used a VA facility ... they wouldn't be facing these barriers." - **Wendell Potter**

## ***Despite stories in the media, don't studies show that veterans receive higher quality care within the VA system than through the private sector?***

"Yes. Studies have shown they get high quality care, often higher quality care, through the VA program than they do in the private sector.

"It doesn't surprise me a bit, but sadly, when there is one or two episodes of things going awry, the media doesn't cover things that go well. They cover those instances when something goes amiss, when there is a problem and

that colors people's opinions and it creates the impression that there's some kind of a crisis going on, and it was isolated to a few places.

“There's no doubt the VA program could use some additional funding. Certainly, during times when we've been in conflict and we've had our men and women in service who've been injured or who need care.

“It's a vital program that has saved the lives of many Americans over the years and has been a place where our vets have received high quality care in many cases, higher than they would receive in the private system. That's a reality. But in many cases, the reality has been blurred or obscured by negative press that has shaped people's opinions in one way or another.” - **Wendell Potter**

## Helpful Links

[Health Care, un-covered](#), *Wendell Potter's Substack*

[Privatizing the VA, V: The Unseen Costs to Veterans and Taxpayers Alike](#), *Health Care, un-covered*

[Privatization Warning: A VA advisory panel issues a red alert on outsourcing](#), *The American Prospect*

[America's veterans didn't sign up for privatized health care](#), *The Hill*

[New Study Settles the Privatization Debate: VA Produces Better Outcomes at Lower Cost](#), *Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute*

[Are Private Health Care Providers Ready to Treat Veterans? Evidence from New York State](#), *Rand Corporation*

# Episode Transcript

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

## Guest Biography - Wendell Potter

**Wendell Potter** is a former health insurance company executive who became that industry's worst nightmare. Time Magazine called Wendell "the ideal whistleblower." Bill Moyers called him a straight shooter. Michael Moore called him "the Daniel Ellsberg of corporate America."

Wendell walked away from his job at Cigna, the giant health insurance corporation, in 2008 after what he has described as a crisis of conscience. Now, Wendell is President of two organizations -- the Center for Health & Democracy; which publishes HEALTHCARE un-covered and houses the Lower Out-of-Pockets NOW Coalition and Business Leaders for Health Care Transformation.

Wendell has explained how insurance companies flout regulations designed to protect consumers, and how they intentionally make it nearly impossible for consumers to get information they needed about their policies in language they could understand.

Wendell went on to become a bestselling author. The New York Times called his first book – *Deadly Spin* – "a tour de force." Pulitzer Prize-winning author and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin called his most recent book – *Nation on the Take* —"a stirring guide for how we can work together to reclaim our democracy and reunify our country."

Wendell has also written numerous articles for publications in the U.S. and abroad, including the New York Times, the Washington Post, USA Today, the Los Angeles Times, the Chicago Tribune, Newsweek and the Guardian, and has been a frequent guest on TV and radio.

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