



Breaking Free From America's Medical-Industrial Complex

A teenager spent the summer cleaning desks with his mother so he could afford a pair of baseball cleats. By the end of the summer, he had saved \$80, but before he could get on the team, he learned he needed a sports physical and the physical cost exactly \$80. So he gave up on the shoes.

For pediatrician, Dr. Ana Malinow, that moment captured something she would confirm in subsequent decades working in the field. America's healthcare system wasn't merely inefficient. It was fundamentally unjust.

It didn't only hurt us in big ways like forcing us to choose between getting expensive medical treatments or living sick, or having to choose the quote unquote least worst, but always very expensive health insurance policy. It also hurts us in small ways, forcing us to compromise to save a few bucks, to make a thousand little choices that though small can cost us the quality of our life.

Today, Dr. Malinow's a retired physician helping lead a movement that's using language usually reserved for political revolutions. As we approach Independence Day and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, activists are calling for a new declaration - this time, independence from what they call the US Medical Industrial Complex.

Welcome to Code WACK, where we break down how our healthcare system really works, what it means for you, and how we can make it better for everyone. I'm your host, Brenda Gazzar.

How did one pediatrician go from treating patients to helping organize a national movement and why do supporters say incremental reforms are no longer enough?

Dr. Ana Malinow spent three decades working as a pediatrician with immigrant refugees and underserved children in Ohio, Texas, Pennsylvania, and California before retiring as clinical professor of pediatrics from the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine. She's past president of Physicians for a National health program and is currently on the steering committee of National Single Payer. This is the first episode of a two-part series.

Dr. Ana Malinow realized early on in her 30-year career as a pediatrician that our healthcare system needed more than just occasional fixes. It needed systemic reform.

While working at a follow-up emergency room clinic in Houston, she spoke to a mother whose teenage son was trying out for the school baseball team. He had helped his mother clean desks at a school over the summer to save up \$80 to buy a pair of cleats. However, he soon realized that he had to pay that amount to have a physical before the trials, so he paid for the physical and gave up the shoes.

Malinow: "That day. I knew I had to do something beyond tinkering around the edges. The system was just cruel and unjust, and I was going to change it."

Dr. Malinow ended up sending the mother a check for \$80 so her son could buy the shoes, but she knew it wasn't going to fix our broken healthcare system.

Over the next three decades, Dr. Malinow encountered story after story that convinced her the problem wasn't individual bad luck. It was the system itself.

There was the child that had a skin infection that turned into a blood infection and required hospitalization because the parents couldn't afford oral antibiotics. And the uninsured child with newly diagnosed Type One Diabetes whose family was considering selling the family farm to afford his lifesaving insulin,

Malinow: Or the child that I took care of with asthma intubated in the ICU whose parents could not afford albuterol or more recently a child with pretty good health insurance whose mother refused to talk about her child's asthma during a

well-child care visit for fear of being charged \$350 by her insurance company just to talk about prevention of asthma during a well-child care visit.

So I think everyone knows someone who has been denied by their insurance company or has had treatment delayed or will be impacted by impending Medicaid cuts or lives in an area with a shuttered hospital or not enough mental health specialists, or not enough PCPs. A few of us are spared these injustices, but many, many are not.

Most Americans have heard of President Eisenhower's warning about the military industrial complex. Dr. Malinow argues health care has its own version.

Malinow: These are the insurance companies and the middleman that are siphoning public dollars and get in between our doctor and our care, pharmaceutical companies that hold us hostage, private equity and venture capital that own the delivery of care, profit generating, quote unquote non-profit health and hospital systems that act just like for-profit, health and hospital systems, and all the politicians who accept political contributions to work for the industry instead of for the people. That's the medical industrial complex. <Laugh>

National Single Payer recently launched what it calls the Declaration of Independence from the Medical Industrial Complex.

Malinow: On this 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, we declare it is time for the people to rise up, organize, take control of the healthcare system, and run it in the interest of the public instead of in the interest of profit. It's time for comprehensive, universal, national Medicare for all. Free from profit.

National Single Payer makes four main demands in the Declaration of Independence from the medical industrial complex.

Malinow: That our government recognize healthcare as a human right, the elimination of private health insurance and the banning of for-profit, delivery of care, the enactment of a publicly financed national single payer program that provides comprehensive coverage to everyone from cradle to grave, and then finally demand that healthcare delivery be transformed from profit seeking

ventures into services organized to serve the people of our country, a system in which all caregivers are freed from corporate control.

So why invoke the Declaration of Independence? Dr. Malinow says the founders wrote that people often tolerate injustice until abuses become impossible to ignore. She sees parallels between that warning and today's broken healthcare system.

Malinow: "It doesn't take much to see the parallels between a despotic king and a despotic industry, or the suffering of the colonies and the suffering of the people held hostage to these conditions. It is radical, but the current crisis, which affects the very life and wellbeing of the people we love and care for requires radical ideas."

She also warns that we're at a tipping point and that incremental reforms aren't enough.

Malinow: "We're at a crisis moment because of the fact that we have these impending Medicaid cuts because insurance premiums are increasing every year because people in the exchanges are facing double digit increases in their premiums to the point where they're going to become uninsured because we have 25 million people who are uninsured and probably twice that many – 50 million – who are underinsured because we have millions of people with medical debt in this country. This is the crisis moment and we need a solution that can be reflective of this crisis."

Dr. Malinow says the goal now is simple. Build a movement that will help us break free from a despotic industry.

Malinow: "Hopelessness is part and parcel of the medical industrial complex system. It is designed to make us feel hopeless, but that's where we come in. If you have community, you are not going to feel hopeless. If you build a movement, you're not going to feel hopeless. A movement raises our expectations and builds power, and that's what the declaration does. It educates and then mobilizes a movement that will make national single-payer, improved Medicare for All free from profit and inevitable necessity."

Individuals and organizations across the country are being asked to sign the Declaration of Independence from the Medical Industrial Complex. Signers, elected officials are notified that constituents are demanding a healthcare system free from profit. The campaign will culminate in a virtual national town hall on October 14th, 2026, bringing together supporters, candidates, and elected officials to discuss the future of national single payer health care.

For more information about national single payer and the Declaration of Independence from the Medical Industrial Complex, visit NationalSingleayPer.com.

Stay tuned for next time when we dive into how single-payer Medicare for All would bring more freedom of choice into health care.

If you've enjoyed this episode and would like to support Code WACK, subscribe, leave a review and share this episode with a friend. This episode was powered by Heal California, uplifting the voices of those fighting for healthcare reform around the country. Thanks for listening. I'm Brenda Gazar, and until next time, stay healthy.