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# **Deadly Rise In Healthcare Cost In The United States !**

*Can healthcare delivery by Amazon Prime offer a viable solution?*

Healthcare has evolved over the years to become a financial giant. American health-care system, whose private insurers generate billions of dollars in profit and pay executives eight figures salaries not despite but because of the fact that they routinely deny care to desperate people in need is an example of a broken system causing a great deal of suffering and countless deaths yearly. The C.E.O. of UnitedHealthcare, fifty-year-old Brian Thompson, was murdered on the street in midtown Manhattan, possibly as a result of frustration generated by the many claim denials leading one man to take extreme measures to send a message to society as a whole.

According to recent news, Thompson was in town for an investors' convention, and had worked for UnitedHealthcare for more than two decades—a company that is part of UnitedHealth Group, a health-insurance conglomerate valued at five hundred and sixty billion dollars. UnitedHealthcare had two hundred and eighty-one billion dollars in revenue in 2023, and Thompson, who became C.E.O. in 2021, had raised annual profits from twelve billion dollars to sixteen billion dollars during his tenure. He received more than ten million dollars in compensation last year.

To most Americans, a company like UnitedHealth represents less the provision of medical care than an active obstacle to receiving it. In addition to Insurance providers ' large profit margin, "Health care spending represented 17.9% of the U.S. economy in 2016, totaling about \$10,348 per person, and continues to rise, according to the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services". A true double edge sword causing a massive bleed in the bank accounts of the patients who are being denied care and left with life changing bills.

UnitedHealthcare insures almost a third of the patients enrolled in Medicare Advantage, a government-funded program facilitated by private insurance companies, which receive a flat fee for each patient they cover and then produce their own profits by minimizing each patient's care costs. Reporting in the Wall Street Journal has found that these private insurance companies, which cover more than a third of American seniors on Medicare, collect hundreds of billions of dollars from the government annually and overbill Medicare to the tune of around ten billion dollars per year; UnitedHealthcare has used litigation to fight its obligation to repay fees that were overpaid.

Care models have shifted to include patients as active participants in their care and increase accessibility. Beyond the ideals of health disparity and social determinants of health, one can say that there have been some great advancements in healthcare. But these innovative measures have affected cost greatly. Thus, Amazon in partnership with JPMorgan and Berkshire set to change the script. They are proposing a healthcare delivery model that can decrease operating cost, increase revenue, and close the gap of access. The model envisions a cash option for those who cannot afford health insurance premiums and costly medications which will improve access. "The new company they plan to establish will not seek to profit off of health care, unlike the industry's leading for-profit insurers, drug makers and many health care providers" Bonny, 2018.

This proposed healthcare model, if successful will affect revenue for many primary care doctors and hospitals. The goal is to use telemedicine through Amazon Prime and the provider gives advice, prescribe or refer to the ER. Such visit can cost as low as \$5 if the patient is self-pay. "Amazon has already signaled it may enter drug sales by launching an online pharmacy". They are targeting the poor who has no credit card, no credit and not enough health insurance, and hopefully close the gap on health disparity and outcomes. Poverty is one of the social determinants of health. This project, if successful, would alleviate health care access for the poor. Amazon has already transformed daily activities, allowing consumers to order and receive almost anything in two days or less with Amazon Prime — and in some areas delivery can occur in under two hours with Amazon Prime Now. Amazon's virtual personal assistant, Alexa; smart speaker, Echo; and ordering button, Dash, allow customers to order from Amazon without a computer, access the news, listen to music, set alarms, control smart home devices, make phone calls and send text messages. By incorporating these technologies into healthcare, the way consumers access care will also be changed.

In rural areas, seniors or consumers wanting convenience could use these tools to order healthcare services. Consumers could schedule appointments, write reviews and see prices of services for physicians on the Amazon website using a concept similar to the partnerships for handyman services by TaskRabbit. In addition, on-demand autonomous vehicles could transport patients to services; communication with Echo audio/video could remove the need for traditional phone, text and email communications; and consumers could receive medicine deliveries in a more convenient manner. The devices could also send medication reminders and allow patients to be monitored virtually rather than through a hospital stay. Ultimately, Amazon could offer healthcare at a lower cost and at a time and place that patients prefer.

Amazon could also innovate in other ways. It recently established a stealth lab, called 1492, that focuses on healthcare technology. While little is known about the products being created, speculation is that the retailer is developing tools to mine data from electronic health records, new telemedicine technologies and healthcare applications for its existing products.

Without knowing what the technology platforms of the future will look like, the most important thing healthcare organizations can do now is to start preparing for a fundamental shift in how consumers will demand services. Leaders need to consider how the tools and technologies being created by outside organizations, like Amazon, could address consumers' demands, connect with patients and make care more convenient as well as what tools will be required to link the technologies together. Forming partnerships with organizations that are creating these tools will be important in staying ahead.

Algorithms could also identify purchase patterns and health information of chronically ill or high-risk patients. With a shift toward value-driven growth, Amazon may give healthcare systems the tools to use data to prevent sicknesses and help patients get and stay well.

For the past few years, pharmacy has been a topic at Amazon's annual meeting. This year, Amazon began selling prescriptions in Japan and distributing medical supplies in the U.S. If Amazon can comply with U.S. pharmaceutical regulations, including specialized supply chain rules for controlled substances, and navigate healthcare's complex payment model, it can change the industry. Amazon could make it easier for physicians to order prescriptions and allow patients to fill prescriptions at a convenient time and place.

Alexa or Echo could save physicians' time in ordering prescriptions by allowing them to simply speak orders rather than typing them up. Amazon's extensive supply chain network could allow patients to access their prescription in various ways, including traditional mail order, two-day mail order delivery for Prime members, Prime Now two-hour delivery in select cities, and instant pickup points at Amazon Lockers or at Whole Foods stores — if pharmacies are installed. In addition, Amazon's existing Subscribe and Save feature could be used to automate refills. Prescription data can be aggregated into Amazon profiles, giving the retailer more customer data as it looks to identify trends between purchases and health conditions.

The AI guided healthcare solutions by Amazon might be futuristic but if tangible changes do not occur in the US healthcare in the near future, the people's frustration will become undeniably acute.

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