

New York Times column: Pandemic shows need to curtail “unnecessary” and “wasteful” doctor’s visits

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A remarkable opinion piece appeared Monday in the *New York Times*. Penned by Dr. Sandeep Jauhar, it is headlined, “People Have Stopped Going to the Doctor. Most Seem Just Fine.” An underline asks, “Do Americans really need the amount of treatment that our health care system is used to providing?”

The column makes the argument that while the pandemic “has resulted in grievous financial losses for hospitals and clinics... Most patients, on the other hand, at least those with stable chronic conditions, seem to have done OK.” From this, Jauhar draws the conclusion that “unnecessary” and “wasteful” doctor’s visits should be sharply curtailed. At the same time, he argues that tax payer cash should be injected into the health care industry.

In other words, the health of the American people, currently suffering through the greatest public health crisis in a century, should be further subordinated to the for-profit health care system. Going forward, a health care system that already denies tens of millions of Americans any coverage and provides inadequate coverage for millions more should be made even more restrictive.

COVID-19’s ravaging of the US population has a lucrative “silver lining.” It provides an opportunity to further restructure the health care system in favor of the profit interests of giant corporations and banks.

Jauhar is a cardiologist practicing in Long Island, New York. He is the author of two *New York Times* bestselling books and another that received the Amazon Best Book of the Month award.

Merrill Singer and Rebecca Allen write in their book *Social Justice and Medical Practice* that Jauhar argues in one of his books that “being a caring and altruistic

physician has become cost-prohibitive.” They continue: “To pay his medical school loans, live the comfortable lifestyle in New York City that he wants, and pay for his child’s private school, Jauhar accepts speaking fees from a pharmaceutical company that makes a heart medicine he prescribes to his patients.”

Can there be any doubt that financial considerations, for his own bottom line and that of the health care industry, influence Jauhar’s arguments?

His supposed proof that patients skipping doctor’s appointments are generally doing “OK” is a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) published May 27. To support his argument, Jauhar both cherry-picks from the study’s findings and misrepresents its significance.

The KFF survey found that “only one in 10 respondents said their health or a family member’s health had worsened as a result of delayed care,” and 86 percent said their health had stayed about the same. Jauhar claims this is great news.

But his interpretation of the findings is highly skewed. First of all, the survey was done a full four weeks before Jauhar’s column was written, and the figures in all likelihood will have changed for the worse with the current explosion of COVID-19 cases. In any event, the real health impact of the pandemic, including reduced access to health care, will not be known for years.

Putting aside the short duration of the study, KFF found that 48 percent of those polled said they or a family member had postponed medical treatment because of the coronavirus outbreak. Eleven percent of those surveyed said they or their family member’s condition got worse as a result. Eleven percent of the

current US population amounts to more than 36 million people. Are we to accept that this level of deteriorating health is insignificant?

Second, Jauhar chooses not to reference the following findings of the survey:

- 39 percent of adults said worry and stress related to the coronavirus has had a negative impact on their mental health; 12 percent said it has had a “major” negative impact.

- 13 percent reported problems paying for food.

- 11 percent reported problems paying medical bills.

- Nine percent reported problems paying for health coverage; eight percent reported problems paying for prescription drugs.

Jauhar chooses to ignore these findings, as they do not fit his narrative that Americans’ health is “OK.” He also ignores other data documenting the horrific toll the pandemic is taking on Americans’ well-being.

Between January 6 and April 19, the administration of non-influenza vaccines was down 3 million compared to the same time period in 2019, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This is mostly due to parents failing to take their children for vaccinations out of fear they might contract the coronavirus. This is paving the way for outbreaks of deadly diseases such as measles, potentially intersecting with COVID-19 and influenza.

The American Medical Association noted last month that over 20 states have reported an increase in opioid-related deaths since the official declaration of the pandemic. Those suffering from addiction face social isolation and a cut-off of access to treatment programs, syringe exchanges and other services. Those who overdose alone are unlikely to be administered naloxone.

A recent analysis from Well Being Trust predicts that as many as 75,000 people may die from suicide, overdose or alcohol abuse—so-called deaths of despair—triggered by social isolation, fear of unemployment and other conditions in the pandemic. “People lose their jobs and they lose their sense of purpose and become despondent, and you sometimes see them lose their lives,” said Benjamin Miller of Well Being.

In contrast to these stark figures on the tragic health impact of the pandemic, Jauhar speculates on the reason the “vast majority patients seem to have fared

better than what most doctors expected,” writing, “Perhaps patients mitigated the harm of delayed care by adopting healthful behaviors, such as smoking less and exercising more.”

There is no scientific basis for Jauhar’s arguments. They amount to propaganda masquerading as science, and in pursuit of a definite agenda. It is no accident that the *Times* is promoting such right-wing trash.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly explained, the *Times* has a long record of promoting anti-scientific theories supporting the slashing of health care for the working class in the interests of the insurance and pharmaceutical companies and private hospital chains. With the Obama administration’s Affordable Care Act, the Democratic Party sought to restructure the US health care system in the interests of the corporations. Under the guise of expanding health care, Obamacare required those without insurance from their employer or a government program to purchase insurance from a private company or pay a fine. Out-of-pocket health care costs for workers covered by employer-backed plans increased, and some 27 million people remained uninsured.

The *Times* has promoted figures such as former Obama adviser Ezekiel Emanuel, who wrote columns for the newspaper such as “Skip Your Annual Physical.” These and other pieces advised people to self-ration their medical care. It is now clear that the Obamacare “reform” was aimed at rationing health care services for the vast majority of Americans.

In the current conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the arguments advanced by Jauhar herald further moves by the ruling elite to sacrifice the health of the population at the altar of for-profit medicine.



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