

- **CA Surprise Ambulance Bill took effect January 1, 2024:** If you receive an out-of-network bill for an ambulance ride taking place after January 1st, contact the Department of Managed Health Care consumer hotline at www.dmhc.ca.gov or 1-888-466-2219.
- **Medical Debt:** Proportion of Medical debt represented by **insured individuals** has grown to **58%**. More than **100 million Americans** have medical debt of some kind. Obamacare plans are notorious for high deductibles. For 2024 the Out of Pocket Limit is \$9,450, not including monthly premiums.
- **Since Cigna had dropped its effort to buy Humana**, it announced on December 10, 2023 that it would now spend \$11.3 billion buying back its own shares of stock. By the end of trading on December 11, the stock price had increased 17%. For CEO, David Cordani, that meant that he was \$26 million richer. His total Cigna stock riches now total \$ 178 million.
- **Cigna bought the Pharmacy Benefit Manager, Express Scripts, in 2018.** 80% of the Pharmacy Benefit Manager business is now owned by Cigna, UnitedHealth Group and CVS/Aetna.
- **Responding to pressure from Gastroenterology groups**, United Healthcare proposed changes to its Prior Authorization policy for GI procedures. Physicians felt the new policy was not acceptable, as it would result in delays for medically necessary care, and add unnecessary paperwork burden to physicians and staff. They also felt that there is no evidence of overuse of the affected GI procedures that would make the restrictions necessary.
- **CVSHealth** has been rebranded as **CVS Healthspire**. The rebranding separates CVS Healthspire from Aetna.
- **The CA Supreme Court** has resurrected a case initially filed by the CA Medical Association in 2012 that alleges that Aetna illegally retaliated against physicians who sent patients to out-of-network clinics.
- **United Health Group**, the parent company of **Optum**, now employs, contracts or aligns with roughly 90,000 physicians in the country. Optum's rapid growth in 2023 is rising antitrust and noncompete concerns as more payers and private equity firms pursue medical practice acquisitions. It is important to note that when physicians are hired instead of acquired, they are not subject to antitrust laws.
- **The FTC (Federal Trade Commission)** has proposed a rule that would ban noncompete contracts for full time employees and independent contractors. 60% of employed physicians were required to sign a noncompete when starting their jobs, according to a survey from the University of Chicago. At least 7 States made an effort to restrict or ban noncompete contracts in 2023. Indiana restricted physician noncompete contracts in July. The FTC has received 27,000 comments to the proposed rule. The FTC is scheduled to vote on its final rule in April 2024.
- **Billionaire entrepreneur, Mark Cuban**, is the co-founder of **Mark Cuban Cost Plus Drug Company**, an online pharmacy that offers the most highly utilized and/or high cost generic medications. The drugs are sold with a 15% mark-up for price, a \$5 fee to pay the pharmacists it works with and a \$5 fee for shipping. The prices are significantly less than what Americans typically pay through insurance.
- **CA law set to increase the minimum wage for Healthcare workers** starting in June 2024 is now under review by the Governor because of the budget deficit.
- **The FDA will allow Florida to import** millions of dollars worth of medications from Canada at far lower prices than in the United States. States have long wanted to be able to purchase medicines in bulk for their Medicaid programs, government clinics and prisons from Canadian wholesalers. Not a done deal since Canada's contracts with pharmaceutical companies may restrict same.