Physician Unionization
A Dialogue
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Current Status

• 7.9% of physicians are in a union,
• similar to the general workforce.

The Future?

• Healthcare unions are gaining steam across the country, as evidenced by the 2023 Kaiser Permanente strike—billed the largest healthcare worker strike in US history. While nurses are leading the way in organizing efforts, doctors and residents are also joining labor movements, demanding better pay, benefits, and working conditions.
A collective stand: The rising trend of physician unionization

- Survey by website MedLinx published by Shamard Charles, MD, MPH

Level of Interest

- Physicians' interest in unionization:
  - Very interested: 26%
  - Somewhat interested: 39%
  - Not interested: 35%

Physician concerns

- Potential concerns about physician unions:
  - Safety and stress in health care: 90%
  - Effective physician-employer relationship: 70%
  - Fair compensation: 70%
  - Resignation from medicine: 40%
Why Not?

Top Priorities

What we heard from HCPs: Detriments of joining a union

- "They are too political and increase the cost of doing business."
- "They create unnecessary hassle."
- "They decrease us from being productive."
- "We are professionals, not blue-collar workers. I think unions would further cheapen the profession in the eyes of the public."
- "I don’t believe there is a place for unions in medicine, or any occupation that is necessary for the well-being of the general population."

Why aren’t physicians currently union members?

- We have the freedom to do what we believe is best for our patients without interference from a union.
- We don’t have the time to be part of a union.
- We have the support of our employer for the benefits and policies we need.
- The union is too political and increases the cost of doing business.
- The union creates unnecessary hassle.
- The union decreases the drive to be productive.
- We are professionals, not blue-collar workers. I think unions would further cheapen the profession in the eyes of the public.
- I don’t believe there is a place for unions in medicine, or any occupation that is necessary for the well-being of the general population."
What we heard from HCPs: Benefits of unions

- "It is good to have open communication with management, and unions are often the only way to accomplish this."
- "Although relatively well paid, we have excessive liability, work hours, and stress, and our only power is changed by the size and power of the company."
- "If it were just times, I think physicians should have a stronger role in decision-making, including appointments, hospital policies, academic institutions, and more."
- "Physician rank power is neither a new nor existing phenomenon in most other professions."
- "It would give physicians a means to contest and negotiate."

What we heard from HCPs: How unions can mitigate the effects of the corporatization of healthcare

- "Unions give physicians some protection against hospitals."
- "As long as Medicare and insurance cut fees every year, doctors need a way to increase reimbursement."
- "Unions can prohibit hospitals and private equity from owning physicians or physician groups, which is not permitted in the legal profession and should not be permitted in the medical profession."
- "Physicians actually have no say as to why they cannot organize when the insurance companies are making the changes to coverages to their patients, which directly affects their patients."

What we heard from HCPs: Is it ethical for physicians to participate in a strike?

- Given the current status of corporate medical care in the US, it is both necessary and unethical not to care for patients— it is a dilemma.
- "Only in extreme circumstances, like if the workplace administration is hostile or inconsiderate of physicians."
- "We would be striking for less selfish reasons than most. We would fight for our patients and better conditions for all of our coworkers in healthcare, as well as ourselves."
- "No, patient well being should be the highest priority."
- "Physicians, like with any other profession or job, can be mistreated and abused, and therefore have every right to fight for the same rights that all other humans have."
- "No, we took an oath to provide medical care and to first do no harm. Striking and leaving patients who are in need of urgent medical care is a moral issue."
- "If we need to, so they can finally appreciate what we do."
Should we strike?

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Sources