



The Price and Rewards of Change

An interview with Johns Hopkins' Dr. Marty Makary



Martin “Marty” Makary, M.D., is director, The Center for Opioid Research and Education; endowed chair of gastrointestinal surgery, director of surgical quality and safety, and founding director, Johns Hopkins Center for Surgical Outcomes Research and Clinical Trials. The Johns Hopkins surgeon is also a *New York Times* bestselling author, whose most recent book, *The Price We Pay*, takes a provocative look at the American healthcare system. He is known as an expert in healthcare innovation, quality measurement science, frail and vulnerable populations, and public health disparities. He previously served in leadership roles at the United Nations World Health Organization for the Safe Surgery Saves Lives initiative. Dr. Makary will be a plenary speaker at AMGA’s 2019 Annual Conference, March 27–30 at National Harbor, Maryland. In anticipation of his presentation, *Group Practice Journal* interviewed him about the challenges of practicing health care today and how to save a broken healthcare system.

GPJ: *What, in your mind, is the most difficult hurdle today’s healthcare system is currently facing? What are steps that you believe can overcome this challenge?*

Makary: One of the greatest issues in health care today is the barriers to a free market. Doctors and their practices struggle with burdensome regulations, an industry of middlemen, and quality reporting requirements that have little to do with health or patient care. As a result, we are seeing record-high rates of burnout. At the same time, the rewards of redesigning care are alive and well. Physician home-grown ideas on how to do things better are the hope that things will get better.

GPJ: *What is something that healthcare systems and providers can immediately do to provide better care for their patient community?*

Makary: The shift to global payments and away from the fee-for-service treadmill is yielding impressive results both in higher quality and greater workplace job satisfaction for clinicians. These market trends are enabling doctors to practice medicine as they see best.

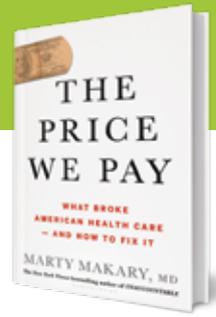
GPJ: *Over the years, you’ve acknowledged our healthcare system’s emphasis on technology and pharmaceuticals, with some of the more basic tenets*

of care, such as communication, transparency, and accountability, put on the back burner. What have you done—and feel others should do—to tip the scale back?

Makary: Many industries have bought the Silicon Valley argument that technology can solve any problem, but health care is much more an art than it is a factory. We doctors have tightly guarded our right to customize care and individualize treatments for each patient’s unique situation. Achieving the right balance of practice autonomy, technology systems safety nets, and decision support is the challenge. As I’ve traveled to 22 cities over two years to conduct the research for my latest book, *The Price We Pay*, I’ve become even more convinced that there is no silver bullet. Instead, we doctors need to learn from each other’s successes in how care can best be redesigned. Along the way, I met the very impressive doctors who are disrupting health care to make it more honest in every aspect, ranging from bedside treatment options to drug pricing and billing practices.

GPJ: *You’ve acknowledged the importance of a culture of accountability in delivering care. What do you feel are essential components of this culture in health care?*

Makary: By far, the leading driver of quality is the local culture of a medical practice. To this end,



The Price We Pay

Dr. Makary's newest book is an eye-opening, timely, urgent critique of America's broken healthcare system. Drawing from on-the-ground stories, his research, and his own experience, *The Price We Pay* paints a vivid picture of price-gouging, middlemen, and a series of elusive money games in need of a serious shake-up. Dr. Makary shows how so much of healthcare spending goes to things that have nothing to do with health and what you can do about it. Dr. Makary also untangles medical bills that are so confusing most doctors can't interpret them and challenges the medical establishment to remember medicine's noble heritage of caring for people when they are vulnerable.

The Price We Pay offers a roadmap for everyday Americans, as well as business leaders, to get a better deal on their health care, and looks at the disruptors who are innovating medical care. The movement to restore medicine to its mission, Makary argues, is alive and well—a mission that can lower costs and save our country from the crushing cost of the medical industrial complex.

Available on Amazon at amazon.com/Price-We-Pay-American-Care/dp/1635574110/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1541176506&sr=1-3&keywords=the+price+we+pay.

there is a lot we can learn from each others' successes. Creating a culture of quality, safety, teamwork, communication, and honesty doesn't happen overnight. It has several factors, most importantly the values of the clinicians and the responsiveness of executives to their concerns. In many group practices I've visited, the tremendously strong culture around these values has translated into great quality care and high workplace happiness.

GPJ: *If you could unilaterally reform one aspect of the country's healthcare system, what would it be?*

Makary: A change in the alignment of incentives to reward quality over quantity. We all go into medicine out of a sense of compassion, but the system beats out that sense of purpose for some and even results in some leaving the profession. Doctors need to practice as they



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see best for their patients, rather than to achieve some financial benchmarks that risk the quality time our patients need. Medicine is still the greatest profession in the world because of the tremendous privilege it is to care for people at a time when they are most vulnerable. We need to guard the specialty and allow doctors to lead the innovation our changing world requires.

GPJ: *You've served in leadership roles at the United Nations World Health Organization. What lessons from other countries have you emulated in your own approach to health care and leadership?*

Makary: My time at the WHO taught me that all medical care is local, driven by a culture of health among patients and a culture of compassion among its medical providers. I've also learned that we have a great commonality—every doctor worldwide can equally contribute to the pool of great ideas on making medical care safer and more patient-centered.

GPJ: *Your general session at AMGA's 2019 Annual Conference is titled "Preparing for an Era of Healthcare Transparency." What do you hope meeting participants will take away from your remarks?*

Makary: I hope to describe what I've been learning over the past few years in researching the topic of healthcare costs in America for the book *The Price We Pay*. I discovered the money games, middlemen, and power struggles that threaten the very practice of medicine, and the many impressive doctors who are disrupting health care through smart, common-sense, patient-centered ideas that will save American health care. I love being a doctor and practicing surgery, and I hope to also inspire folks by reminding them of the great forefathers of American medicine who laid the groundwork for our trusting relationships with our patients. [GRJ](#)

Hear more from Dr. Marty Makary at the AMGA 2019 Annual Conference, March 27–30, 2019 in National Harbor, Maryland. For details, visit amga.org/ac19.

ADVERTISERS INDEX

AMGA 2017 Executive and Leadership Compensation Survey _____	45
amga.org	
AMGA 2017 Medical Group Operations and Finance Survey _____	5
amga.org	
AMGA 2018 Medical Group Compensation and Productivity Survey _____	Inside Front Cover
amga.org	
AMGA 2019 Annual Conference _____	23-28
amga.org/ac19	
AMGA Career Center _____	9
careers.amga.org	
AMGA Consulting _____	Back Cover
amgaconsulting.com	
AMGA Membership _____	7
amga.org	
AMGA Provider and Employee Satisfaction Benchmarking Program _____	Inside Back Cover
amga.org/prosat	
AMGA Risk Resources _____	47
amga.org/risk	
AMGA Social Media _____	39
amga.org	
ISMIE _____	Regional Ad
ismie.com/growth	