

REBUILDING THE U.S. HEALTH LEFT

Letter to the Occupy Movement: Freeing our Physicians

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What does it take to turn around?

We can spend a lifetime witnessing people's struggles, listening to stories both complex and deep, and still manage to miss the most obvious patterns. In our profession, the quiet truth is easily drowned out by the necessity to diagnose, prescribe, appropriately refer, hospitalize, rehabilitate – all the while juggling through the evidence for, or against, the thousands of interventions and pills we are made to encourage ordinary people to ingest.

It is too easy to succumb to the expansive medical science that has us gazing down at the subtle genetic variations in a faulty cell or exploring the distant recesses of the brain, without ever realizing that nothing we ever hope to achieve through medicine will ever impact the people's health the way freedom from structural oppression can. The liberty to access resources equitably, to advocate for our community, to partake in a meaningful healthy life



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Doctors for the 99% is a coalition of physician activists united in solidarity with Occupy, the people's movement against mass injustice.

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with family and friends – these are the fundamental determinants of physical and mental health. We deviate from this simple wisdom and replace it with a patchwork of remedies that keep us complacent, adherent and most frighteningly dependent on a dangerous system.

A system worth nearly one trillion dollars a year, in fact. It fuels a world where pharmaceutical lobbyists contribute millions to our legislators, healthcare industry representatives dictate the terms of our healthcare “reform,” and hospital administrators function as CEOs serving profit-driven board members. There are very few winners in this system, and the wellbeing of billions are put up as collateral in a vicious gamble being played out under the guise of modernity, advancement and “democracy.”

In reality, our healthcare system has turned into a bottomless dumping ground. The symptoms of our

societal ills, increasingly reflected in our bodies and minds, are too easily shaped into medical problems that throw the locus of blame squarely back on the individual. We do not talk nearly enough about why our poorest neighborhoods have the greatest prevalence of obesity, why children in neighborhoods like Harlem who are victims of zoning and environmental racism have the highest rates of asthma or lead poisoning, and how areas with the highest income inequality have astounding rates of depression or unwanted pregnancies. Instead we promote bariatric surgery for the morbidly obese, acute care clinics for asthmatic children, and colorful anti-depressants for those crushed by the hopelessness around them. And the profits continue to rise.

It takes a collective movement, an uprising, and a fresh process to help us find the courage to face

the system whose roar we no longer hear. Like the physical occupation of Liberty Square, we create and fight for a space of conscience where collective re-learning takes place, where creativity and imagination evolve into solutions, and where every voice is heard and acknowledged. It is a space where hospital and clinic walls are torn down to hear the chants from the street. It is a place where sterile white coats are shed and replaced with the liberation from institutionalized oppression. We no longer agree to passively participate in the medical-industrial complex. We take back the art and science of our profession from the distortions and the profits, and place it in the service of the people.

Thank you for liberating us, we turn around and stand with you.

