For-Profit Dialysis: The Authors Reply

Our August 2014 article cited a meticulous meta-analysis of virtually all dialysis mortality studies that found higher death rates at for-profit facilities. Allen Nissenson—an executive whose dialysis firm recently settled federal kickback charges for $389 million—seeks to overturn that conclusion based on two cherry-picked studies that used idiosyncratic multivariate analyses to adjust away the observed differences.

Moreover, convincing research has uncovered mechanisms behind for-profit dialysis firms’ bad outcomes. These firms systematically overdosed patients on erythropoietin even after its dangers were known, which increased profits but also deaths. For-profit facilities were also less likely to refer patients for transplants (you lose customers that way). And they shied away from peritoneal dialysis for children, which is the preferred—but less profitable—modality.

The overwhelming weight of evidence indicts for-profit dialysis care. Similarly damning evidence warns that profit-seeking incentives kill thousands of hospital patients each year and, as our study found, condemn hundreds of thousands of vulnerable home care patients to inferior care at inflated prices.

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