



DONATE



INDEPENDENT DOCTORS FORM NEW ADVOCACY GROUP

APR. 24, 2017, 7:25 PM BY ERIN MANSFIELD 3 COMMENTS

Independent doctors have started an organization in Vermont dedicated to helping them keep their small practices in the face of what they consider pressure to sell out to hospitals.

Doctors have created a Vermont chapter of the Association of Independent Doctors, a national nonprofit organization started in Florida in 2013 that says, "We fight a fight that doctors have neither the time, means, nor clout to pursue."

The Vermont chapter will have 15 members, who are all current or former board members of HealthFirst, the nonprofit organization that represents the interests of independent doctors at the state level.

Independent doctors are self-employed and own their own practices, as opposed to working in a hospital or for a practice that a hospital or hospital system owns. Insurance companies often pay independent doctors less money than hospital-employed doctors for performing the same procedures.

The Vermont Legislature has passed three laws since 2014 seeking to have the Green Mountain Care Board, which regulates health insurance prices, force insurers to pay independent and hospital-employed doctors equitably. Some legislators say those laws [have not led to meaningful progress](#) to protect independent doctors.

"Nationwide, large hospital systems have been aggressively buying up independent doctors and turning them into employed physicians," Marni Jameson Carey, the executive director of the national Association of Independent Doctors, said in a news release.

"When hospital systems buy private medical practices, costs skyrocket and quality suffers," Carey said. "As the number of independent doctors shrinks, unfavorable market dynamics, including higher health care costs and lower quality of care, grow. AID is working to reverse that trend, which is not good for patients, doctors or communities."

Amy Cooper, the executive director of HealthFirst, said Vermont has lost 20 independent doctors in the past 18 months. Those doctors either left the state, sold their practices to a hospital system, or accepted employment with either a hospital system or community health center, she said.

"Our concern is really with the growth of large, corporate networks that change the type of care that's delivered to patients," Cooper said. "I actually think that small community



hospitals and independent doctors have a lot in common.”

Cooper said the new group “really helps connect us with the independent doctors across the country who are dealing with the same sorts of issues, and it really helps us get our message out more nationally about the value of independent practices.”

The only large hospital system based in Vermont is the University of Vermont Health Network, which started in 2011 as an umbrella organization for the UVM Medical Center and Central Vermont Medical Center in Berlin. The network now includes three Vermont hospitals and three hospitals in upstate New York.

Central Vermont Medical Center told the Green Mountain Care Board in March that the number of outpatient practices the network owns in the region has grown by 10 to 15 practices in just three to five years. Regulators [have begun questioning](#) whether the expansion will lower expenses in the health care system.

“We do not aggressively go after acquiring any practices, and we have not done so in any time that I’ve been in senior management, which goes back quite some time,” said Dr. John Brumsted, the CEO of the UVM Medical Center and the UVM Health Network.

“The only practices that we have acquired have been those that came to us and requested that we brought them inside of the network, and it’s because they couldn’t maybe go the practice on their own, and so to preserve access for those communities, we have hired those physicians and brought them into our practice group,” Brumsted said.

“We have no approach where we go out and try and make a pitch and sell to a practice that they should come inside, and actually I’m unaware of any hospitals in Vermont that do that,” Brumsted said. “It may be a national phenomenon, but I do not believe that that’s anything happening in Vermont.”

In southern Vermont, the New Hampshire-based Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center controls Mount Ascutney Hospital and Health System in Windsor. It has also been strengthening its relationship with Southwestern Vermont Medical Center in Bennington and created a [“strategic partnership”](#) with Brattleboro Memorial Hospital.



Amy Cooper is executive director of HealthFirst. File photo by Erin Mansfield/VTDigger



Dr. John Brumsted. File photo by Erin Mansfield/VTDigger

RECENT STORIES



QUIROS TAKES NEW APPROACH IN EB-5 CASE:...



RUTLAND FIRE CHIEF MAY QUIT; DOESN'T SEE...



EDUCATION FINANCE BILL EMERGES WITH TAX RATE...



SCOTT PREDICTS \$26M SAVINGS FROM STATEWIDE TEACHER...



ETHICS COMMISSION BILL GAINS STEAM IN HOUSE



SENATE VOTES DOWN BILL TO RAISE SMOKING...

Filed Under: [Health Care](#)

Tagged With: [Association of Independent Doctors](#), [Healthfirst](#), [University of Vermont Health Network](#)



Erin Mansfield covers health care and business for VTDigger. From 2013 to 2015, she wrote for the Rutland Herald and Times Argus. [Read more](#)

 EMAIL: EMANSFIELD@VTDIGGER.ORG

 FOLLOW ERIN ON TWITTER [@ERIN_VT](#)

LATEST STORIES BY ERIN

[Senate votes down bill to raise smoking age to 21](#)

[Senators plan to challenge Scott with fee for housing bond](#)

[House passes scaled-back version of data brokers bill](#)

[Report an Error](#)

[Upload a Document](#)

[Tip Drop](#)

COMMENT POLICY

VTDigger.org **requires that all commenters identify themselves by their authentic first and last names.** Initials, pseudonyms or screen names are not permissible.

No personal harassment, abuse, or hate speech is permitted. Be succinct and to the point. If your comment is over 500 words, consider sending a commentary instead.

We personally review and moderate every comment that is posted here. This takes a lot of time; [please consider donating to keep the conversation productive and informative.](#)

The purpose of this policy is to encourage a civil discourse among readers who are willing to stand behind their identities and their comments. VTDigger has created a safe zone for readers who wish to engage in a thoughtful discussion on a range of subjects. We hope you join the conversation. If you have questions or concerns about our commenting platform, please [review our Commenting FAQ.](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

3 Comments VTDigger.org

 Login ▾

 Recommend

 Share

Sort by Newest ▾



Join the discussion...

**Mary Martin** • a day ago

Independent doctors should receive the same reimbursements as large hospital docs. Maybe even more, since they have additional work loads.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Nate Awrich** → Mary Martin • a day ago

Your argument is that the state government should determine how much health care providers, hospitals and clinics can be paid for services.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Louis Meyers, M.D.** • a day ago

This is a very positive development, not only for independent medical providers but also for Vermonters throughout the state. I believe an additional step would be for health care providers at UVM and Dartmouth-Hitchcock to be allowed to form either a traditional union or some other organized coalition to advocate for themselves and especially their patients without the fear of being fired by the system.

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

ALSO ON VTDIGGER.ORG

Teacher retirement proposal stumps Finance Committee

8 comments • 2 days ago•

Ian Bender — It's just math...right? If you need \$8 million and the governor won't let you raise taxes ... then you need to not ...

Ethics commission bill gains steam in House

2 comments • 15 hours ago•

Vicki Gentler — No one wants their ethics questioned. the sad reality is our ethics slip a little at a time, and we don't notice. ...

John McClaughry: Four new bills to levy a carbon tax

22 comments • 2 days ago•

Edward Letourneau — How does taxing fuel that people require to get to work and heat their homes in a northern climate ...

Patients complain of long wait times for surgeries

12 comments • 2 days ago•

James Rude — Great reporting! However, these problems of wait times seem to have emerged since we began our quest to ...

[Subscribe](#) [Add Disqus to your site](#) [Add Disqus](#) [Add](#) [Privacy](#)