



Column on doctor shortages failed to talk about market-based reforms that can address it

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I have a lot of respect for Sally C. Pipes, but she leaves out important points in her Chicago Tribune column that ran in The Plain Dealer March 21 ("Private sector can help solve our doctor shortage"). The Graduate Medical Education National Advisory Committee is influenced by a special interest group, the American Medical Association, which concurred about a doctor surplus in 1981. It has always been in the medical profession's interest to keep the production of doctors tight to maximize income. Like other guilds, they don't like competition from new entrants. It is unsurprising that they predicted a doctor surplus.

Another point: As Nobel-winning economist Friedrich Hayek would tell us, trying to determine the correct number of doctors is a "fatal conceit"-- only the market can determine that. Finally, Pipes says nothing about licensing laws; immigration laws (e.g., H-1B work visas) that make it harder for foreign doctors to come here; states' lack of "provisional license" laws for well-trained foreign doctors; and "scope of practice" laws that prevent ancillary health care professionals -- like nurse practitioners and physician assistants -- from practicing to the full extent of their training. Those market-based reforms would also address the doctor shortage.

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