For-profit Takeover of Dialysis in Maine

Patients needing regular treatment in chronic dialysis are particularly vulnerable and their health truly at the mercy of these lifesaving treatments. Without dialysis, patients can die within a matter of weeks or even days. That's one of the reasons Medicare covers end-stage renal disease for all people, regardless of age. And that's also why it's so disturbing that a Colorado-based, national, for-profit corporation named DaVita is poised to buy and take over Eastern Maine Medical Center's dialysis services, making the company the only game in town for a large chunk of the state.

"They want to farm out dialysis, but it's mind-boggling to me that we're turning over the control of quality and safety to somebody from Denver, Colorado—a for-profit company," said Kathy Day, a retired RN who used to work at EMMC and now volunteers as a patient safety advocate. She has been closely following the DaVita case. "We will lose local control over Maine citizens' care."

Eastern Maine Medical Center, a nonprofit hospital system based in Bangor, announced in April that DaVita, a Fortune 500 company and the country's largest dialysis care corporation with more than 1,800 clinics, was paying $10 million for the rights to provide services to EMMC's approximately 220 dialysis patients. It is reportedly not buying any of the land that EMMC's current dialysis clinics sit on, nor the buildings, but simply the dialysis operations and, ostensibly, the Medicare and other revenues that come from billing for those treatments.

RNs and other critics fear that DaVita will cut corners to squeeze profit out of those accounts at the expense of the health and safety of those patients. They have been fighting the sale, most recently testifying at a July 10 certificate of need hearing before the state against DaVita's takeover. "We have several serious concerns about this sale," said Cokie Giles, RN and president of the Maine State Nurses Association. "We have heard about DaVita's uneven record in providing quality patient care. Can we expect better? As a for-profit, will DaVita put patients first and will the company keep a fair share of the revenues earned here in Maine?"

According to Day's research and discussions with dialysis advocates across the country, former DaVita patients have charged that the company engages in numerous practices that save money but potentially jeopardize safety, including reusing supplies and equipment in dialysis clinics, was paying $10 million for the rights...