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## Wichita group involved in new association for independent medicine

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A Wichita anesthesiology practice was involved in the launch of a new national association that plans to support independent, physician-owned medical practices in the face of an increasing number of private equity takeovers.

Mid-Continent Anesthesiology Chartered, which provides obstetric services at Wesley Medical Center and obstetric and operating room services at Ascension Via Christi St. Joseph, is a founding member of the Association for Independent Medicine, alongside three others: Midwest Anesthesia Partners in Naperville, Ill.; Anesthesia Management Services in Commerce



ASSOCIATION FOR INDEPENDENT  
MEDICINE

Mid-Continent Anesthesiology Chartered in Wichita was one of four medical practices to launch the Association for Independent Medicine, which plans to support groups that choose to remain independent by providing information, education and political advocacy.

Township, Mich., and Anesthesia Practice Consultants in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The group represents nearly 400 anesthesiologists from three states, but the association is open to any physician in private practice, no matter their speciality.

"In fact, we want the diversity because the different specialties are going to bring different insights into what really matters to them and what problems they're facing, and it allows the others of us to either offer unique solutions or learn from them," said David Norris of Mid-Continent Anesthesiology, who serves as an OR director at St. Joe.

Norris said he became increasingly drawn to the business side of medical practice after earning his master's in business administration from Wichita State University about 10 years ago.

"I decided that I was going to try and create help physicians gain the business acumen they don't have so that they can run their own practice," he said.

That mission closely aligned with Marco Fernando, another anesthesiologist and president of Midwest Anesthesia Partners, a physician-owned group serving 23 sites throughout Chicago. Fernando spearheaded the launch of AIM with the goal of supporting groups who choose to remain independent by providing information, education and political advocacy.

"That checked a lot of boxes for me," Norris said. "At our first conversation, I pretty much knew that I wanted to participate."

AIM's formation comes amid a rise in private equity-funded groups, or "corporate medicine," taking over independent practices and hospitals.

According to a May 2021 report by the American Medical Association, for the first time, less than 50% of patient-care physicians work for physician-owned practices because of mergers and acquisitions, a change in the type of practice being chosen by younger physicians, and physician job changes. Since 2012, there's been an 11% decrease in the number of wholly physician-owned practice, AMA data shows.

When corporate medicine takes over, physicians lose their decision-making abilities, Fernandez said in the news release.

And that has implications for patient care, Norris said.

"I would argue those physicians who are independent are less likely to experience burn out and therefore provide better care," he said.

"Burned out physicians frequently don't have the energy to take good care of the patient. They're tired, exhausted, frustrated, and maybe even a little apathetic. All those feelings directly impact clinical decisions, which affects the care received by the patient."

AIM says it plans to provide guidance on best practices for responding to hospitals' requests for proposals, sharing group purchasing opportunities and networking.

"Eventually we will start advocating on Capitol Hill and with policymakers to really put forth our voice and the problems we face as guys trying to run their own small shop, versus the big conglomerates who have different wants," Norris said.

In Wichita, Norris said the good news is there hasn't been a decrease, so far, in the number of physician-owned practices.

"There's a strong entrepreneurial independent spirit and mindset in Wichita," he said. "... I would love for every practice in Wichita to become a member of AIM. I think that would show some nice solidarity and really highlight the uniqueness of Wichita and actually what a nice place it is to practice medicine."

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Reporter

*Wichita Business Journal*

