

Evaluating the Impact of Health Care Consolidation Proposals

Health care consolidation is increasingly common in today's health care landscape. While often pursued in the name of efficiency or coordination, consolidation can carry unintended consequences, such as higher costs, diminished quality of care, increased physician burnout, and lower patient satisfaction. Though the future impact of any proposal can't be predicted with certainty, asking the right questions can help stakeholders and regulators evaluate whether a proposed consolidation is more likely to benefit or harm a community. The following questions can supplement an inquiry to state or federal officials about the competitive impact of consolidation activity by a large corporation and urge regulators and attorneys general to consider these outcomes when reviewing a merger or acquisition.

Impact on Competition

- Does the business already have a dominant position in the local market?
- Are there other businesses in the area that provide the same goods and services as the business in question? If so, how many?
- Does this consolidation proposal appear to be part of a larger trend of consecutive acquisitions in the same market (i.e., a roll-up strategy)?
- Does it appear that this consolidation proposal will give the business greater influence over input sources for its health care services (e.g., patient referrals)?
- Do concerns about health care consolidation exist in the local community? If so, what are they?
- Will this consolidation proposal consolidate one particular service or specialty in the local community (e.g., imaging, cardiologist services)?

Impact on Patient Care

- Can patients easily switch from one business to another for health care in the area?
- Have patient satisfaction scores changed after this business acquired other businesses in the area?
- Have prices for health care goods and services changed after this business acquired other businesses in the area?
- Have critical services been eliminated or reduced as a result of consolidation by this business (e.g., maternal care, behavioral health)?
- Will this proposal decrease access to health care services for marginalized groups (e.g., closure of safety-net facilities, nonacceptance of Medicaid, CHIP, or other low-income insurance offerings)?
- Has continuity of care been hurt by consolidation by this business (e.g., patient cannot see clinician who they've been seeing for several years)?

Impact on Clinician Workforce

- Have clinicians experienced weaker autonomy due to consolidation by this business?
- Have clinicians experienced productivity pressures as a result of consolidation by this business?
- Has clinician satisfaction or incidence of burnout changed due to consolidation by this business?
- Have clinicians been obligated to sign a noncompete agreement after they were acquired by this business?