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DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05019  
HEALTH AFFAIRS 38,  
NO. 3 (2019): 368-373  
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The People-to-People Health  
Foundation, Inc.

# Patient-Centered Care, Yes; Patients As Consumers, No

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**ABSTRACT** There are numerous calls for building health care delivery systems that are more patient centered. The focus on patient-centered care has increasingly begun to rely upon, and even merge with, the concept of patients as consumers. Early references to patients as consumers were made by patient advocates who were attempting to challenge professional and corporate dominance in health care. Today, “consumer-driven” health care has become associated with neoliberal efforts to emphasize market factors in health reform and deemphasize government regulation and financing. In our view, a narrow focus on consumerism is conceptually confused and potentially harmful. The consumer metaphor wrongly assumes that health care is a market in the usual understanding of that term, that the high cost of US health care is a function of excessive consumer demand, and that price transparency and competition can deliver on the promise of reducing costs or ensuring quality. Furthermore, a consumer metaphor places disproportionate burdens on patients to reduce health care costs, and it could erode professional obligations to provide appropriate and effective care.