

Wohlforth Swings and Misses with Column on Health Care Costs

Author: Dr. Robert Hall | Opinion in the Anchorage Daily News, December 12, 2017

[Read the full opinion piece here.](#)

Recently the ADN printed an opinion column with an interview with Dr. Alan Gross that contained some remarkable statements. Remarkable enough that an opinion column was put on the front page instead of its usual spot back in the local news section. The claims about Dr. Gross' compensation as an orthopedic surgeon in Juneau back in 2013 were certainly interesting reading. Dr. Gross said he was making \$2.5 million a year, about half from the practice of orthopedic surgery and about half from his group's investment in an MRI and X-rays. He stated he was making that level of income while doing five to six surgical cases a week. The reader was left with the impression that Dr. Gross' compensation is typical of orthopedic surgeons in Alaska. That article was part of opinion columnist Charles Wohlforth's continuing series about his views on Alaska health care.

As an orthopedic surgeon who has been practicing in Anchorage for the last 22 years, I think it is important to let Alaskans know that my experience, and that of my Anchorage colleagues, has been far different from that of Dr. Gross. I have no way of verifying Dr Gross' compensation claims, but I can compare them to data from my own practice, Orthopedic Physicians Alaska (OPA) , that contains 24 orthopedic surgeons. I have talked to people who were familiar with Dr. Gross' practice in Juneau so I have some idea of the types of surgical cases he was doing. Using our overhead, our fee schedule, our payer

mix, and Dr. Gross' stated surgical volume, if he had been working at OPA in 2013, a generous estimate is that he would have taken home \$400,000 a year. In 2018 that amount would be significantly less. This is a very good living by any standard but far short of \$1.25 million. I have talked to some other orthopedic practices in Anchorage and their experience is more in line with ours at OPA than with Dr. Gross'.

[Alaska faces the nation's highest health-care costs. Why?]