

He ruled the operating room and then daytime TV. Now, Dr. Oz is set to take over a \$1.5 trillion health agency

By [Tara Bannow](#) STAT News, February 4, 2025



Dr. Oz speaks during a campaign stop in Erie, Pa., in September 2022 while running as the Republican Senate candidate in Pennsylvania. *DAVID DERMER/AP*

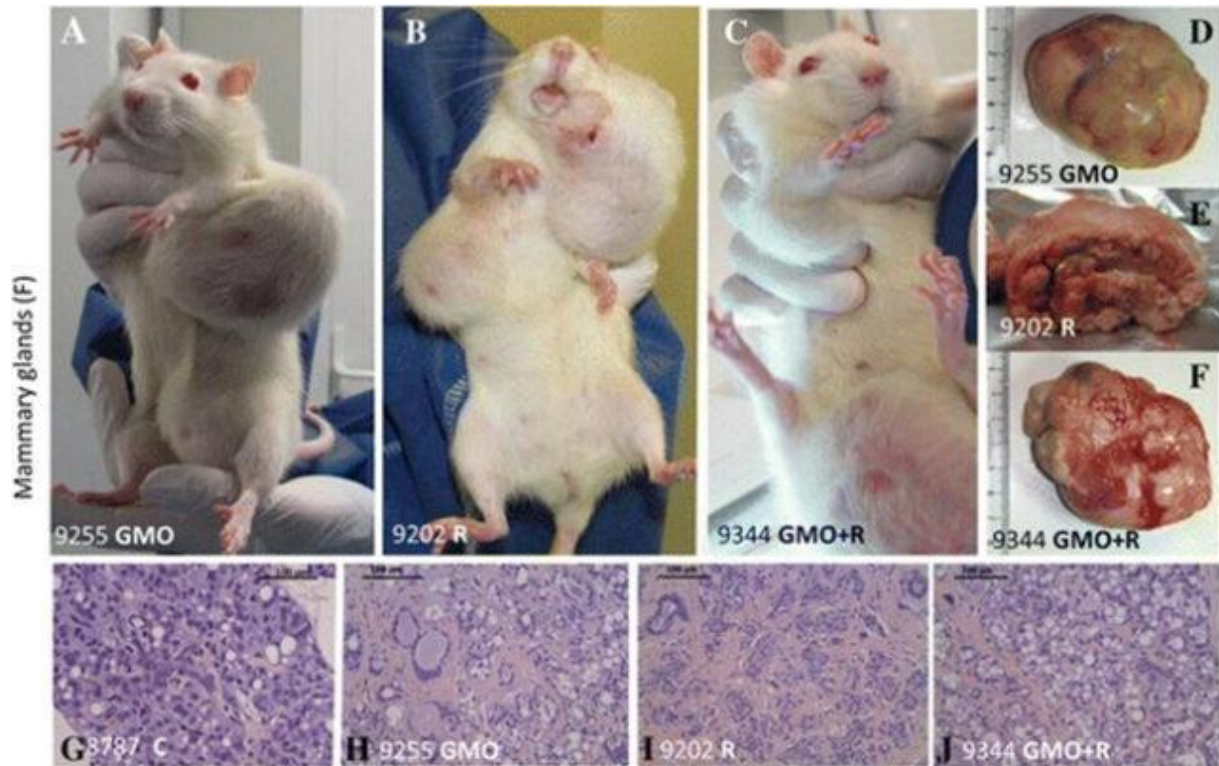
Mehmet Oz, seated in a cushioned chair before a studio audience, directed his two guests to a giant screen behind them. It showed a ghastly scene: rubber-gloved hands holding two live rats with tumors bigger than their heads protruding from their sides and bellies. They'd been fed genetically modified food as part of a study.

It's hardly the standard backdrop for someone now poised to lead a [\\$1.5 trillion](#) federal agency that oversees crucial health care programs for older adults, low-income Americans, and people with disabilities. But little about this famous surgeon-turned-TV host adheres to tradition.

Oz, in a sleek gray suit, the overhead lights glinting off his voluminous hair, turned to the anti-GMO activist to his left and asked incredulously, "If these claims — and they are pretty serious ones — are true, how can it be this information is being ignored?"

Watching from the green room of "The Dr. Oz Show," Alison Van Eenennaam was horrified. An expert in the field, she knew immediately that the type of rats used in the study — which was heavily criticized, retracted, and then [republished](#) in an open-access journal — famously sprout precisely the kind of tumors shown in the photos as they age. In fact, the control rats also grew tumors.

"If someone sitting at home looks at that, sees 'GMO' and a great, big, lumpy rat, it's basically a misinformation gold mine, if you will, because it creates causation in someone's mind from something that's totally unrelated to what the diet of that rat was," said Van Eenennaam, an animal genomics and biotechnology professor at the University of California, Davis. She had begrudgingly agreed to appear on the 2012 episode, but later questioned whether that was a mistake.



Images from a study on rats that were fed genetically modified foods. “The Dr. Oz Show” highlighted the study in a 2012 episode and showed his audience the rats in photos A and C. *SÉRALINI, GE., CLAIR, E., MESNAGE, R. ET AL. REPUBLISHED STUDY: LONG-TERM TOXICITY OF A ROUNDUP HERBICIDE AND A ROUNDUP-TOLERANT GENETICALLY MODIFIED MAIZE. ENVIRON SCI EUR VIA SPRINGER NATURE*

Oz’s show went on like this for more than a dozen years, ticking off countless doctors and scientists along the way and triggering lawsuits and government warnings. Oz helped make vaccine critics like Joseph Mercola and [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#) household names by featuring them on his show.

In 2016, he first publicly aligned himself with then-presidential candidate Donald Trump by declaring him to be in excellent health. In early 2020, he joined Trump in promoting a malaria drug with dangerous side effects for the treatment of Covid-19. Today, the trim, smooth-talking 64-year-old is best known for breathlessly touting unproven supplements and sharing his stage with so-called experts who were really there to sell products.

Those close to Oz see a more complicated figure. They describe him as exceedingly ambitious, weirdly energetic, and preternaturally sharp. He left medicine at the top of his game and became singularly focused on achieving the same level of success in television.

And now, just three years after jumping into politics with a failed run for Senate as a Republican in Pennsylvania in 2022, he's poised to become administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, [after Trump nominated him](#) to lead the vast agency that regulates Medicare, Medicaid, health coverage for children, quality in nursing homes and clinical labs, patient privacy, and the Affordable Care Act.



Oz, then the Pennsylvania Republican Senate candidate, shakes hands with then-former President Trump during a Nov. 5, 2022, rally in Latrobe, Pa. *WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES*

“When he gets into something, he goes off the deep end for it,” said Isaac George, an associate professor of surgery in Columbia University’s division of cardiothoracic surgery, who trained under Oz and considers him a mentor.

Oz has kept a decidedly low profile since his nomination, and he hasn’t given any clues about his plans for the agency he’ll likely run. What is clear: Like most Republicans, he’s all in on privatized Medicare — he once called for [Medicare Advantage for All](#), which is exactly what it sounds like. And he seems willing to amend his views so they fall in line

with his party, even if that means pushing back against Covid-19 lockdowns, for example.

For all the people who dismiss him as a “[quack grifter](#)” and a “[health care huckster](#),” Oz, who declined to comment for this article through a spokesperson, has a surprisingly large, albeit less vocal, contingent of loyal supporters. Many are heart surgeons he either trained or worked with at Columbia University, who remember him as a generous mentor and an accomplished surgeon. Still more are people who worked on his TV show, who say he was unusually approachable and fun. “Like your uncle,” one person put it.

But Oz’s financial ties to the products he promotes have grown even more blatant in the three years since he gave up his television show. Recent social media posts tout a supplement company, iHerb, which he’s a paid sponsor for, even though they aren’t identified as ads. This past August, Oz’s YouTube channel [featured a video](#) urging viewers to buy private Medicare plans from his insurance agency sponsor, a company accused of misleading older adults and making repeated, unsolicited phone calls. And as of 2022, Oz owned hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stock in major insurers he’d oversee in his government role.

None of this is disqualifying for a role in the Trump administration, in which the lines between government and personal gain are decidedly blurred. Opposition to Oz’s nomination to lead CMS has been quieter and less vociferous than other Trump Cabinet picks like RFK Jr. If both men are confirmed by the Senate, RFK Jr. would be Oz’s boss, as secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

That said, a handful of consumer advocacy groups have called Oz [unqualified](#), criticized his promotion of products that don’t work, and characterized his support for privatized Medicare as “[dangerous](#).” In December, a [group of Democratic senators](#) asked Oz to explain his support for privatized Medicare and whether he would divest from the insurance industry if confirmed.

Assuming no unforeseen scandals, Oz’s Senate confirmation is generally viewed on Capitol Hill as all but assured.

While he's concerned about Oz's conflicts, Arthur Caplan, who heads the NYU Grossman School of Medicine's medical ethics division, said he takes comfort in the fact that Oz spent years as a respected surgeon in a renowned surgery department. Caplan has criticized Oz in the past for touting unproven therapies like Reiki and aromatherapy, but noted that now, most major cancer centers offer those services.

"That gives me hope that he can bring his science, which is surely there, to bear, despite issues that come up about, can he be fair if he's got conflicts?" Caplan said. "I'm going to hope for the science to come through."

Caplan is not affording the same latitude to RFK Jr., whom he called a "danger" and a "menace."

Tough love from dad

For a guy who hasn't agreed to many interviews as of late, Oz is surprisingly candid on social media. In between iHerb ads, his 3.7 million X followers are regularly treated to family photos featuring his wife, four kids, and various grandkids. There's the family around a dinner table. The family in fall. The family dressed chicly all in white.

The day his dad died in 2019 at age 93, Oz was characteristically online. On X and [Facebook](#), he credited Mustafa Oz with inspiring him to become a doctor. The elder Oz was a Turkish-born cardiothoracic surgeon who did his residency in Cleveland, Ohio, and went on to work at a hospital in Delaware, where he and his wife, Suna, raised Oz and his two sisters, Seval and Nazlim. Mustafa and Suna Oz moved back to Turkey in 1997, where Mustafa Oz continued to practice medicine into his 80s.

There was an element of tough love in Oz's childhood. In an expansive [2013 interview](#) with The New Yorker, Oz recalled that his father believed in hard work and little else. "If I came home, proud and excited, with a ninety-seven on an exam, he would ask if somebody got a higher grade," Oz said. "And if George or Tom got a ninety-eight then I might as well have failed."

Mustafa Oz also had little patience for the alternative medicine that would become central to Oz's career, calling his son's interest in that realm "suicidal," according to [The New Yorker](#).

Mehmet Oz didn't just learn medicine from his dad. He learned to be a businessman. On top of his lucrative career as a surgeon, Mustafa Oz garnered considerable wealth through real estate holdings in both the U.S. and Turkey. Mehmet Oz is in an ongoing legal battle with his sister, Nazlim, whom he claims drained several million dollars from their father's bank account. Mustafa Oz's estate is currently being litigated in Turkey and the U.S.

In his business-minded trajectory, after Mehmet Oz graduated with a bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1982, he simultaneously earned a Master of Business Administration and a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1986. On a [podcast interview](#) during his Senate run, Oz said it was imperative that doctors understand the business side of medicine. That campaign mostly focused on things like energy and taxes, but Oz did lean on his experience as a surgeon.

"I fixed hearts, but I'll fix every single person's problem if we can do it," Oz said on the same podcast. "That's an obligation of government."

Meanwhile, medicine, much like entertainment, is becoming something of a tradition in the Oz family. Oz's son, Oliver, is attending Columbia's medical school.

A celebrated surgeon

The turn of the 21st century was a transformative time in heart failure treatment. Doctors were finally getting close to proving that implantable mechanical heart pumps could indeed keep patients with end-stage heart failure alive. In 2001, the New England Journal of Medicine [published the first study](#) establishing the devices' benefit over medications. Oz was among the authors.

"This was really groundbreaking research for patients who had broken hearts and were otherwise destined to die or wait for a heart transplant

that might not be available to them,” said Simon Maybaum, a senior faculty member in Northwell Health’s cardiac transplant and advanced heart failure program, who worked with Oz at Columbia. “[Oz] was really a pioneer in the international community with respect to that field of medicine and specifically that field of research.”

Oz spent the entirety of his cardiothoracic surgery career at the Upper Manhattan hospital now known as Columbia University Irving Medical Center, starting with his residency in 1986. The hospital is among the country’s [largest transplant sites](#). Heart transplants were Oz’s speciality, along with mechanical hearts, but he performed plenty of bread-and-butter bypasses and valve procedures, too. Oz was also a faculty member at Columbia, where he taught and performed research with heart surgeons in training.

Former colleagues and trainees remain dazzled by Oz years later, describing him as a quick learner and a skilled surgeon. Not only that, they say he was engaging and curious. He had an easy time connecting with other doctors and patients. And there was debate about when he slept, since he’d often respond to emails in the middle of the night.

“He’s the hardest working person I’ve been around,” said Aftab Kherani, a surgeon who did a research fellowship under Oz and now works in venture capital.

Kherani’s group had lab meetings at 6 a.m. on Fridays, and he said they’d often have to wake Oz up. “He’d be curled up in his office because he’d been working late at night or doing a transplant late at night,” he said.

Vivek Rao, surgical director of mechanical circulatory support and cardiac transplantation at the Peter Munk Cardiac Centre in Toronto, trained under Oz starting in 2000. He similarly recalls Oz having superhuman energy.

“I’d finish a transplant at 2 or 3 in the morning and he’d be sitting at his desk eating almonds,” Rao said. “He’d say, ‘This is the best time to get work done.’”

Also clear early on: Oz was drawn to the spotlight, said Eric Rose, Oz's then-boss, who chaired the surgery department. Rose said Oz reveled in the media attention when the pair performed a heart transplant on the baseball player Frank Torre in 1996.

Oz's penchant for alternative medicine was also present from the start. In the early 2000s, he [published articles](#) about offering massage and yoga to help patients [recover from surgeries](#). For a time, he even had an energy healer come into the operating room.

"She'd, like, pray over the heart-lung machine during cases," said Rose, who's now at the cellular medicine company Mesoblast. "She was innocuous, but I think Mehmet realized that she was diminishing his credibility."

Despite his accomplishments in medicine, Oz's attention began to shift in the 2000s. In 2003, he launched a short-lived Discovery Channel show. In 2005, he briefly considered running for governor of New Jersey, and instead published the first of his 14-book "YOU" series with anesthesiologist Mike Roizen. By then, he was a regular guest on "The Oprah Winfrey Show." And in 2009, he launched "The Dr. Oz Show."

It's not clear when Oz stopped performing surgeries. As of 2013, he was down to one day per week, and in 2018, Columbia said his title changed to reflect that he was no longer seeing patients. By that time, the university was under mounting pressure to cut ties with Oz.

Several former colleagues say Oz's pivot to television was a loss to the surgical field, and to patients.

But George, the Columbia cardiothoracic surgeon who trained with Oz, said it's somewhat understandable. Cardiac surgery is a repetitive field. To get good at it, you have to do it a lot, develop mastery, and then keep on doing it, he said.

"It's not that he was bored, but I think he wanted a different experience in his life and he had achieved so much in surgery," George said. "You

live a lifetime in our field in 10 or 15 years, so it's not uncommon for people to switch careers at some point.”



Oz and chef Rachael Ray speak as panelists at a Weight Watchers event in October 2009 in New York City. ROGER KISBY/GETTY IMAGES

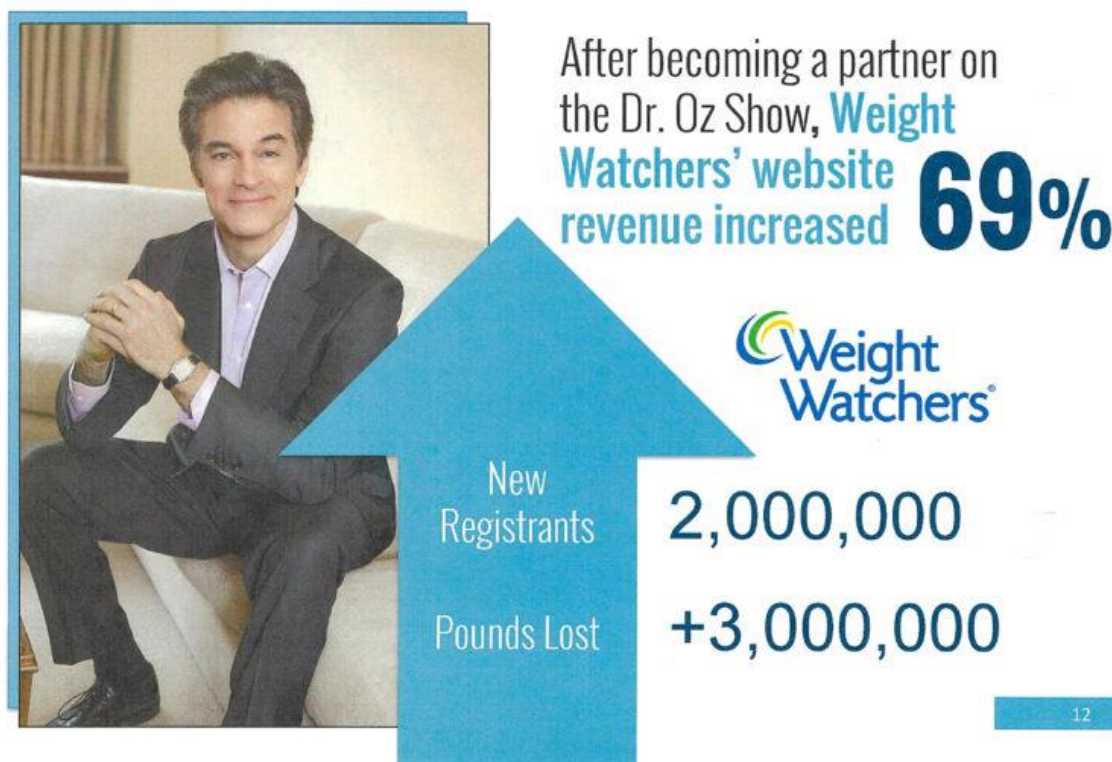
Made for TV

When Oz [testified](#) before a U.S. Senate subcommittee in 2014, Dean Heller, a Republican from Nevada, asked him a straightforward question: You don't make money from the products that appear on "The Dr. Oz Show," right?

Oz's response was equally simple. "That is true."

Seven years later, in a [court deposition](#), Oz admitted that was not true. He said he thought the senator was only asking about weight loss supplements. In reality, the popular daytime TV show had plenty of paid sponsors: Metamucil, Weight Watchers, Crest toothpaste, and Olay skin cream, to name a few.

In fact, Oz's agent assembled a whole flyer, which became public as part of a lawsuit, about the "Oz Effect" to court even more. It said that Weight Watchers' website revenue grew 69% after partnering with the show, and that NetiPot sales grew 12,000% after Oz mentioned it during an episode.



Oz's agent assembled a flyer in 2015 touting the ability of "The Dr. Oz Show" to spur higher sales and visibility for products featured on the show, known as "The Oz Effect."

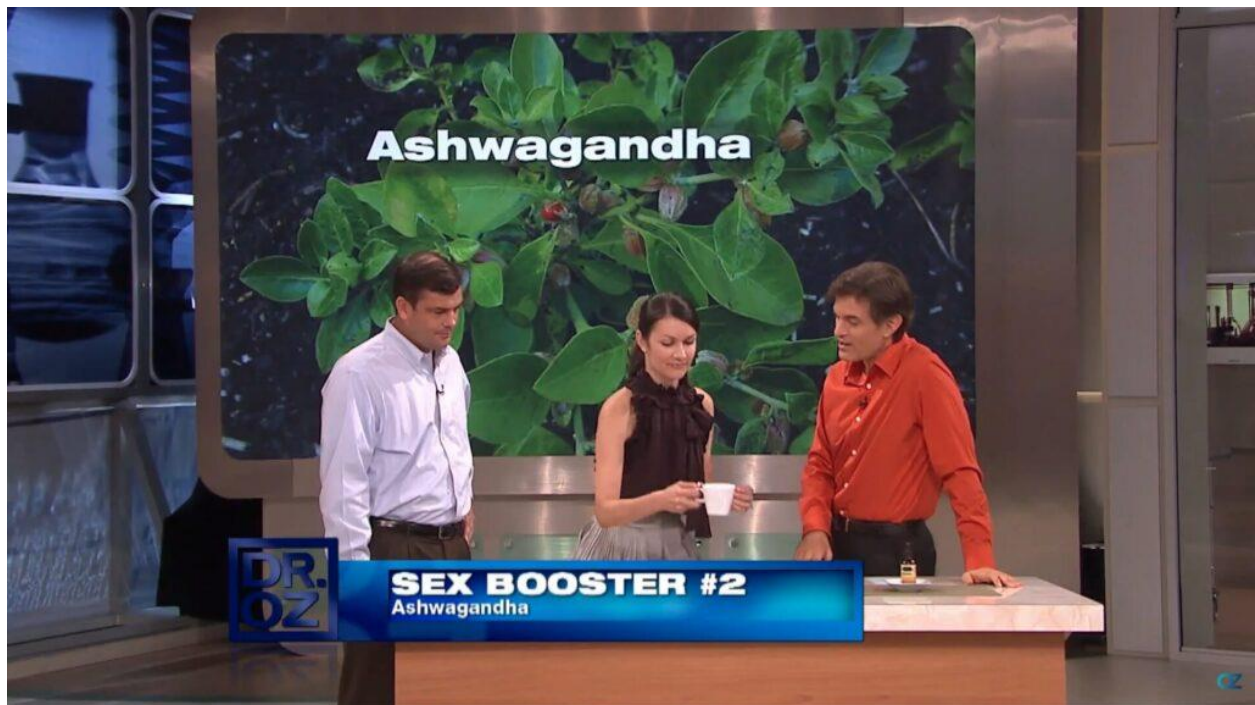
"We are amazed at the influence of the show and Dr. Oz to drive viewers to our stores," the flyer quoted then-Walgreens executive Christine Kubisztal as saying.

There was always a perplexing lack of clarity about which products Oz was and was not paid to promote. What is clear is that during and after the show's 13-year run, Oz has significantly grown his wealth through sponsorships. At the same time, he succeeded in convincing many of the show's employees that his primary motivation was to help people get healthy.

"I think he genuinely believes that he can bring value to the world by bringing his point of view and his ability to learn and question things and

think differently,” said Michael Crupain, a physician who for six years headed the medical unit on “The Dr. Oz Show.” “He really wants to make the world a better place.”

That vision permeated through the staff, who said they, too, believed they were helping people. Sasha Mitchell-Fuller, who worked on the show for almost six years, said one time she was told to research what was in a McDonald’s breakfast sandwich.



Oz promotes the shrub ashwagandha on season 1 of “The Dr. Oz Show” in 2009. *SCREENSHOT/DROZ VIA YOUTUBE*



Oz demonstrates the spread of pesticides in a segment about genetically modified organisms during season 6 of “The Dr. Oz Show” in 2014. SCREENSHOT/DROZ VIA YOUTUBE

“I’ll never forget getting that assignment,” Mitchell-Fuller said. “I’m like, ‘Ugh, who cares. People will eat this anyway. Why are we even doing this?’ But no, that shit is important.”

Many of the things discussed on the show — the dangers of food dyes, ashwagandha tea for energy, magnesium for sleep — have become mainstream today, Mitchell-Fuller said.

“Did we get some of the information out too fast? I don’t know, maybe. But the goal was to help, ultimately,” she said.

That mission quickly butted heads with the demands of a daily TV show, for which ratings were paramount. Staff would be tasked with finding evidence to support a solution’s benefit, and sometimes that would mean extrapolating findings from animal studies onto humans, Gregory Katz, an assistant professor of medicine at NYU Langone Health who worked as a medical researcher on “The Dr. Oz Show” for a year, wrote in a [blog post](#).

“This is the type of extrapolation that I’ve criticized again and again as bad science that misleads and misrepresents,” Katz said.

While Katz wrote that the show did “put out a lot of bullshit” on supplements like raspberry ketones or green coffee bean extract, he said in an interview that there were also helpful segments, like how to look for signs of pancreatic cancer and the health benefits of losing 10 pounds. There was practical guidance like the healthiest things to order at fast food restaurants or how to get more sleep.

“The most outlandish and controversial things are what gets the most attention,” Katz said. “But I think there’s a bit of an outrage economy in criticizing the most scientifically questionable recommendations.”

Several people who worked on the show described Oz as kind, funny, and engaging — not like the typical intimidating TV host. Some recalled him connecting sick family members with specialists at Columbia, complete with private rooms and free parking.

Oz garnered a number of critics over the years for his statements on the show. Most notably, 10 medical doctors wrote a letter to Columbia in 2015 urging the university to cut ties with him, arguing Oz is “guilty of either outrageous conflicts of interest or flawed judgements about what constitutes appropriate medical treatments, or both.” Two years later, three doctors wrote in the American Medical Association’s [Journal of Ethics](#) that to the medical and political establishment, “Dr. Oz is a dangerous rogue unfit for the office of America’s doctor.”

One would-be critic, physician Richard Besser, eventually walked back his condemnation of a “Dr. Oz Show” segment on arsenic in apple juice. Besser, who worked for ABC News at the time, had a fiery exchange with Oz on “[Good Morning America](#)” in September 2011 over the show’s finding that arsenic levels in five brands of apple juice exceeded the federal allowable limit for drinking water. Two months later, Besser shook Oz’s hand on “[ABC World News Tonight](#)” with [Diane Sawyer](#) and told him, “You were right.”

Two developments changed Besser’s mind. The Food and Drug Administration in November 2011 admitted it had withheld publication of tests showing arsenic levels in apple juice exceeded the drinking water limit as much as fourfold.



Oz testifies before the Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Insurance during a hearing on protecting consumers from false and deceptive advertising of weight loss products in June 2014. *LAUREN VICTORIA BURKE/AP*

Before that, the agency had stressed the amount of arsenic in apple juice was negligible. Around the same time, [Consumer Reports](#) released its own investigation finding that 10% of apple juice samples had total arsenic levels exceeding the drinking water limit.

Besser, now CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, blamed the FDA for the dust-up on the second TV interview. “What bothers me the most is that when Mehmet and I spoke before, the information I had from the FDA was incorrect,” he said.

In 2023, the FDA [finalized guidance that caps](#) the amount of inorganic arsenic in apple juice at the same level as drinking water.

In some cases, the rush to get shows out meant that red flags were ignored or guests weren’t properly vetted before their appearances. In a

particularly egregious example, producers got an email warning them that an upcoming guest, Lindsey Duncan, could damage the show's credibility and expose it to legal risk. They'd already filmed the segment with the self-proclaimed naturopathic doctor, but the email said the state of Texas had determined his mail-order degree was fraudulent.

As a remedy, the producers cut Oz's use of the word "doctor" to describe Duncan, but the segment, in which Duncan touted the exact green coffee bean supplements his companies sold, aired in 2011 as planned. Four years later, Duncan agreed to pay the Federal Trade Commission [\\$9 million](#) for falsely claiming the supplements caused people to lose 16% of their body fat in 12 weeks without diet or exercise. Both before and after the show, Duncan launched a targeted campaign to begin selling the supplement in Walmart stores and on Amazon.com.

For years, Oz was a [paid sponsor](#) for the supplement maker Usana, which the watchdog group Truth in Advertising has dubbed a [multi-level marketing scheme](#), because most of its distributors don't make money. Usana has been investigated by multiple government agencies and sued by investors and distributors, according to the [Associated Press](#). In 2017, the company agreed to pay a \$275,000 [settlement](#) after a California nonprofit found that dozens of its products contained unsafe levels of lead.

Oz used his television fame to get into Trump's good graces early on. In 2016, he invited the then-70-year-old presidential candidate onto his show and ran through recent test results from a piece of paper Trump handed him. Everything from his blood pressure to cholesterol was in a healthy range, according to the document.

"If a patient of mine had these records, I'd be really happy and I'd send them on their way," Oz said.

In 2020, Trump solidified the alliance by [appointing Oz](#) to his Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition, an advisory committee that promotes healthy eating and physical fitness.



Oz measures the waistline of Sony Corp. CEO Sir Howard Stringer as Stringer gives his keynote address at the Venetian during the 2009 International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. *DAVID MCNEW/GETTY IMAGES*



From left, Susan Luck, Oz, and David Shulkin take part in a panel discussion at Donna Karan's Urban Zen Initiative Day Three, a wellness forum aimed at merging Eastern and Western medicine, in New York City in May 2007. *ANDY KROPA/AP*

Dr. Oz goes to Washington

Oz kicked off a segment of his TV show in 2019 with a quiz. Which of these can you get for free? A cup of coffee? No. A pack of gum? No. How about a health insurance plan that may include vision, dental, hearing, and wellness benefits?

“Believe it or not, it is possible to get health insurance plans now with a zero dollar monthly premium,” Oz said to thunderous applause from the audience. “Millions of people already are doing it and so can you.”

In the clip, [posted to Oz’s YouTube channel](#) five months ago, he was talking about Medicare Advantage, the form of Medicare run by private insurers. Medicare, the health program for people over 65 and people with disabilities, is squarely under the purview of the CMS administrator. Republicans tend to support Medicare Advantage, but many government reports and academic studies have turned up widespread fraud in the program and found that some plans improperly restrict access to care.

Oz’s fondness for Medicare Advantage isn’t surprising, but his financial ties to the program are unusual for someone vying to be CMS administrator. In 2020, he co-wrote a [Forbes column](#) touting a far-fetched idea to replace all private insurance, employer-sponsored insurance, and traditional Medicare with Medicare Advantage. As of 2022, Oz owned up to \$600,000 worth of stock in UnitedHealth Group, which runs the biggest Medicare Advantage operation, plus up to \$100,000 in CVS Health, which owns another Medicare Advantage insurer. A spokesperson for Oz did not respond when asked if he still owns those shares.

In the [2019 TV segment](#), Oz interviewed an insurance agent from a “trusted sponsorship partner,” TZ Insurance Solutions. The New Jersey-based company, which he’s done [other ad spots](#) for, has settled multiple lawsuits alleging it violated a federal law protecting people against unsolicited sales calls. TZ’s [Better Business Bureau page](#) lists dozens of complaints from people who said they were bombarded with calls, sometimes up to 40 per day, from different numbers. Others accused TZ

of elder abuse, noting that it does not always provide accurate information about the plans it sells.

Oz has kept a relatively low profile in recent months, but behind the scenes, he's busy preparing for the new role. Andy Slavitt, who led CMS under former President Obama, said Oz called him the day after Trump announced him as his pick for CMS administrator to ask him all about the job: what success looks like and what the pitfalls are. He's since called back with more questions.

"I think there's a lot of humility and a lot of seriousness, a lot of intelligence, a lot of intentionality, and he's got a real plan," Slavitt said.

Policy-wise, Slavitt said Oz wants to use incentives to get patients more engaged in their care. He wants to improve the physician experience. In line with RFK Jr., he wants to lower rates of chronic illness. And Oz is very interested in using artificial intelligence and other technologies to help do those things, said Slavitt, who now runs a firm that invests in startups targeting Medicare and Medicaid.

Oz's 2022 pivot into politics wasn't a surprise to those who know him. It's something he'd been mulling for at least two decades, starting with a short-lived plan to run for governor of New Jersey in 2005. Rao, the Toronto doctor who trained under Oz, said Oz had held a fundraising event at his house at the time, but ultimately decided he couldn't out-raise the Democratic challenger, former Goldman Sachs executive Jon Corzine.

"There was no doubt in my mind that politics was in his future," Rao said.



Oz, then a Republican candidate for U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania, greets supporters in Bensalem, Pa., in November 2022. RYAN COLLERD/AP

The news that Oz was running for Senate ruffled feathers in the medical community. Timothy Caulfield, research director of the University of Alberta's Heath Law Institute, [argued in Scientific American](#) that Oz's brand of "wellness woo" is not harmless.

Early in the pandemic, for example, [Oz said](#) hydroxychloroquine might treat or prevent Covid-19. Caulfield questioned whether Oz should still have a medical license and called on regulators to sanction him.

"Misinformation spouting celebrities seem to be a GOP favorite," Caulfield wrote. "This move is very on brand for both Oz and the Republican Party."

Some friends and former colleagues say they don't agree with Oz's political views. Just before the 2022 Senate election, Winfrey came out in support of [Oz's opponent](#), Democrat John Fetterman.

"She named him America's doctor, but I don't think she ultimately liked his politics, and neither did I," said Rose, Oz's former boss at Columbia.

Oz's health policy positions have grown [more conservative](#) in response to attacks from GOP rivals. While running for Senate, he argued that "life begins at conception" and told voters to "push back" against Covid-19 mandates.

Other stances are informed by his experience as a doctor. In 2013, he urged an audience of governors not to let their states hire smokers, claiming it would reduce their health care budgets by 15% within five years. In the same speech, he said he'd decided years earlier never to operate on smokers.

"I say that because I care about them," Oz said. "What I tell them is, 'When you come to see me, if you don't stop smoking, you obviously don't value this process and we're not going ahead. But I can work with you and we can get you to stop.'"

Former colleagues — doctors and TV producers alike — interviewed by STAT were unanimous in their support for Oz becoming CMS administrator. That may be a self-selecting group, as anyone who does not support a Trump nominee is less likely to respond to a reporter's inquiry on the subject.

They said that not only is Oz a hard worker and fast learner, he surrounds himself with smart people and actually listens to them.

Timothy Sullivan, who was the Dr. Oz show's publicity director for six years, said he immediately sent Oz a congratulatory text when he heard the news.

"He's not a wrecking ball," Sullivan said. "Everyone's opinion has value to him."