



Honesty with Patients Is Optional with Some Doctors

February 10, 2012 by *Patrick A. Malone*

A large survey of doctors published in the prestigious journal *Health Affairs* finds that while physicians generally subscribe to the idea that honesty is the best policy, they don't always practice honesty with patients, especially when it conflicts with their self-interest.

The article by Lisa Iezzoni, MD, of Harvard Medical School and others, says:

[A]pproximately one-third of physicians did not completely agree with disclosing serious medical errors to patients, almost one-fifth did not completely agree that physicians should never tell a patient something untrue, and nearly two-fifths did not completely agree that they should disclose their financial relationships with drug and device companies to patients. Just over one-tenth said they had told patients something untrue in the previous year.

The authors conclude:

Our findings raise concerns that some patients might not receive complete and accurate information from their physicians, and doubts about whether patient-centered care is broadly possible without more widespread physician endorsement of the core communication principles of openness and honesty with patients.

In 2013, patients will be able to look up data on their doctors' financial ties with drug and device manufacturers, thanks to the new Affordable Care Act. Tentative regulations setting up the reporting system were published in December by the Food and Drug Administration.

As the [New York Times'](#) [Robert Pear](#) reported recently, researchers have found that payments can influence doctors' treatment decisions because they steer patients to more expensive drugs and medical devices.

Patrick A. Malone
Patrick Malone & Associates, P.C.
1331 H Street N.W.
Suite 902
Washington, DC 20005

pmalone@patrickmalonelaw.com
www.patrickmalonelaw.com
202-742-1500
202-742-1515 (fax)