



ACTIVE CONVERSATION



BAD MEDICINE

Asking patients to grade their doctors sounds like a great idea. But it's actually perverting the practice of medicine, encouraging doctors to overprescribe and overtreat, driving up costs and sometimes worsening care.

By Anand Narayana

SCHEFFER, HILL & SMITH (HSHS) is a leading hospital in the United States. It has a long history of providing high-quality care to its patients. In 2012, HSHS was named one of the most admired hospitals in the United States by *Forbes* magazine. The hospital's success is due to its commitment to patient satisfaction. The hospital's patient satisfaction scores are consistently high, and this is a reflection of the hospital's commitment to providing high-quality care to its patients. The hospital's patient satisfaction scores are consistently high, and this is a reflection of the hospital's commitment to providing high-quality care to its patients. The hospital's patient satisfaction scores are consistently high, and this is a reflection of the hospital's commitment to providing high-quality care to its patients.

PHOTO: JEFFREY M. HARRIS

BITTER PILL

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Kai Falkenberg's story on how patient satisfaction surveys are distorting the practice of medicine elicited passionate responses from readers. Cleveland Clinic's Rafid Fadul called the surveys a "meaningless tool used essentially to ratchet down payments to physicians." The most heated response came from Press Ganey, a leading survey company referenced in the story, which asked that we publish this letter from health care venture capitalist Eugene D. Hill III. Hill, a managing partner at SV Life Sciences, wrote: "[The] article departed from **FORBES'** usual high standard of investigative journalism. One of the principle [sic] unsupported assertions, that patient satisfaction is not correlated with clinical outcome, is refuted by common sense as well as a long history of patient satisfaction research, and most recently by a peer reviewed formal assessment that was published in the Jan. 17, 2013 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine*. It is not surprising that physicians, the understandably biased subjects of evaluation,

some of whom have historically resisted both formal quality assessment as well as patient feedback ('the doctor knows best syndrome') and some of whom are lacking in interpersonal skills/bedside manner, might be less than willing to accept negative feedback. To criticize the evaluation-service vendors is akin to shooting the messenger. In an age characterized by excessive reliance on diagnostic testing versus physical examination and patient interview, an overreliance on ineffective therapies such as antibiotics for viral infections that propagate drug resistance, and an epidemic of prescription painkiller abuse, it is unconscionable for physicians to suggest they must offer 'Vicodin goody bags' to patients as an attempt to improve survey results. If true, as reported in your article, such actions only reinforce the necessity of more formal assessment of our highly inefficient and error-prone health care nonsystem. Incentive compensation based upon patient satisfaction is a minuscule (1%) portion of provider

payment, an important point the **FORBES** article neglects to mention, leaving it to the reader to infer that the percentage is far greater. Medical services exist for the benefit of the patient, not the reverse; hence, bringing patients into the evaluation process is not only appropriate, it is essential. **FORBES'** readership deserves a higher standard of objective reporting and less sensationalistic journalism about this crucially important and pervasive subject."

OUR READERS REACT TO DOCTOR RATINGS

- F** PATRICK BURNSIDE, M.D. "Such a needed article. Medicine needed a kick in the pants to become more consumer friendly, but we overshot the mark, and patients and U.S. health care costs are suffering as a result by letting patients control the decisions."
- F** PAUL ALEXANDER CLARK "Patient satisfaction is an important outcome. Patients deserve to have a voice. Appropriate scientific methods and reliable data are incredibly important."
- F** ROBERT C. SOLOMON, M.D. "Many physicians have written about this but are handicapped by Press Ganey's ad hominem implication that they are just whiners because they don't like being judged."