



Minnesota Tells Dangerous Doctors: We Won't Punish You

February 6, 2012 by *Patrick A. Malone*

It's been known for a while that Minnesota ranks dead last in the nation in the frequency with which its doctors are disciplined by the state licensing board for harming patients. Now we know why.

A new investigative series by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* has some dizzying quotes from state officials who are charged with protecting the public.

For example, when asked why Minnesota so seldom took action against a doctor's license when authorities in another state had already done so, Ruth Martinez, supervisor of the board's complaint review unit, replied:

"What's the point of piling on?"

(Earth to Ms. Martinez: If your state is the only one that hasn't restricted a doctor's license to practice after some horrendous harm to patients, where do you think that doctor is going to end up practicing?)

Perhaps even more revealing are the words of the board's executive director, Robert Leach, who is quoted as follows by the *Star Tribune*:

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"I'm satisfied the public is protected in Minnesota -- very satisfied. And remember that part of public protection is ensuring an adequate supply of health care practitioners to the public. You can't take everybody out of practice just because they had a problem. That's why we're not in the business of removing credentials unless absolutely necessary. We want to be remedial."

When the board declines to act against a doctor, patients have no way of finding out that that doctor might be a problem -- because by law in Minnesota, only public discipline is disclosable. So there's a real Catch 22 for patients trying to make sure they are seeing a top notch doctor.

Kudos to Public Citizen's Health Research Group for its compilation of the discipline statistics state by state, on which the Minneapolis newspaper report was based.

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