

## **Virtual Mentor**

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### **BANDER ESSAY CONTEST**

#### **2011 Winning Essay**

#### **Secret Shoppers and Conflicts of Interest**

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#### **Scenario**

Delta Health was one of three large health insurers that shared a Midwest multistate market. Recently all individual and group practices and clinics that were among



time and it can help you to serve your clients [patients] better in the long term” [4]. In a bustling primary care practice, the presence of a few secret shoppers would not materially change the quality or timeliness of care.

The critique that such methods introduce deception into the patient-doctor encounter discounts the importance of assuring clinical excellence, a goal of the evaluation. “The traditional patient-physician relationship requires that both parties be open and honest,” argues one physician [4]. While physicians are ethically bound to be honest with their patients [3], patients regularly lie to their doctors. They fib about diet, exaggerate symptoms to get sick notes, and fake pain to obtain narcotics. Doctors are trained to appreciate that things might not

qualified to comment on this aspect of the medical experience [8-10]. The fourth goal is problematic. Clinical decision making is a complex process that cannot be fully evaluated with a checklist. Physicians should be expected to approach each patient in a professional manner—and can thus be evaluated at this level—but assessment of the treatment plan is beyond the scope of a one-size-fits-all exercise.

**Would the Data Be Useful to Both Mid-West Internal Medicine Clinic and Delta Health?**

but this is in some sense impossible since the secret shoppers will be company employees.

This would be an unfair. However,

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