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## **Restoration of Doctor Discipline Database Excludes Some Reporters**

***Statement of Dr. Sidney Wolfe, Director, Public Citizen's Health Research Group***

*Note: Dr. Sidney Wolfe is a member of the executive committee of the National Practitioner Data Bank. The data bank today restored its Public Use File – with conditions.*

For users of these data such as Public Citizen, academic researchers and journalists, the restoration of the National Practitioner Data Bank's Public Use File is an important step in the right direction since the file has been down for more than two months. There is no question that important work leading to improvements in some medical boards' and hospitals' function has resulted from the use of this crucial data in investigating deficiencies in medical boards and, generally, in hospitals.

The downside, however, is that as a new condition of obtaining the data, users will have to agree not to use this entirely confidential information (not identifying any physician by name) in combination with publicly available information to identify and develop extended profiles on specific doctors.

Whereas this new restriction will not have any impact on the work Public Citizen has done for many years with the data, reporters who have carefully combined unidentifiable Public Use File data with other information from court records or even medical board websites\* will now have to agree to forgo this important, painstaking research they have previously done to bring more information to people about their doctors.

There is no question that half a loaf is better than none. But the exclusion from access by reporters doing important investigative work to improve patient safety by providing the public with more information about doctors and pressing for reform of medical board and hospital discipline is unacceptable.

We will join efforts by others to liberate the other half of this important loaf of valuable information.

\* An increasing number of medical boards are now posting online doctor-identified data, including board actions, hospital actions and malpractice payouts against doctors.

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