



Other Viewpoints

Stop sheltering dangerous doctors

President Barack Obama’s administration has gone overboard in trying to protect physicians from the public’s right to glean essential information about their doctors.

A move by the Department of Health and Human Services to shut down an online database betrays promises by Obama and Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to promote transparency in health care. Public access must be restored immediately.

Removal of the National Practitioner Data Bank followed the *Kansas City Star’s* story about a Kansas neurosurgeon with a trail of malpractice lawsuits. Despite being sanctioned by a hospital and having to pay almost \$4 million in response to the lawsuits, Robert Tenny was in good standing with the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts.

The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration held out the possibility of financial penalties if the *Star* published a story using information from the database. The *Star* printed the story, and the government shut down the public portion of the data bank, which journalists have used for over a decade to inform the public about doctors whom they entrust with their care.

The public data bank files list disciplinary and malpractice actions against doctors, who are identified by a number rather than a name. Reporters mine the bank for generic stories about problematic doctors and have used other information to learn some physicians’ identities.

Reporting assisted by the data bank has led to reforms in state laws and a greater emphasis on transparency and patient care by state medical boards.

Groups that advocate on behalf of journalists and consumers are protesting the government’s move. The Department of Health and Human Services should listen. Its job is to protect the public, not physicians with records they would like to hide.

— *The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press*

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SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDWEST\*



Son has history of interrupting trips

You may have heard, our weekend trip to Lawrence and Emporia ended in Salina.

We were home by noon on Friday when we were supposed to be relaxing at the lake and getting ready for dinner with my brother and sister and their families.

It's not the first time we've had to abort a trip, though most go off without a hitch. While the cat seemed to be the culprit this time, we've decided to blame our son, Lacy, because he's usually the one who makes us change our plans.

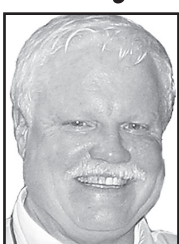
The first time I can remember was the first time he broke his head. We lived in Colorado then, but down in the valley. We planned to spend some weekend time near our old home up in Creede.

It was a brilliant late summer afternoon, I remember. Lacy was about 6. I was fishing. Cynthia was reading her book. The kids were climbing around some rocks when Lacy fell and hit his head.

A helicopter ride to Denver and a week in the hospital later, we sort of forgot about that weekend.

I should say that I can't ever recall canceling a trip because of something the girls did. They had their trips to the emergency room, but stitches, bandages, stuff like that. Never even a broken bone. Lacy, on the other hand, was hard on his little body.

When he was in junior high, he went out for track. He was at practice one day while we were at the state press convention in Overland Park. Lacy and his sister, who was in high



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

school, were at home fending for themselves.

We were out for dinner with some other publishers and didn't get the message until we got back to the room about midnight. Lacy had fallen off the slide in City Park and broken his wrist. He was OK, but ... he fell off the slipper slide at age 14?

That's the night we found out just how long it took to drive from Kansas City to Oberlin without stopping — six hours flat. Lacy was home and doing well when we got back; Lindsay and Pat had done all the right things.

When Lacy was in high school, we were on the way to Kansas City to visit my sister and her baby at KU Medical Center. We were west of Salina when the sheriff's dispatcher from home called: "Lacy's been in a wreck. A deputy is on the way to check."

We did a U at the next exit. The dispatcher called back: "The deputy is there. He thinks Lacy's OK, but the ambulance crew is going to check him."

We slowed down to the speed limit. Later, we couldn't decide whether to hug him when we got back, or kill him. We settled on grounding him.

Regents press for generic courses

Ignoring a decade of academic quality control by Kansas faculty, the Kansas Board of Regents is poised to standardize general education coursework across the state. In August, the chair of the Kansas Board of Regents called for uniform numbering and naming of all general education courses across Kansas.

The impetus comes from community college and technical schools that have difficulty getting Kansas universities to accept their course credits. The reason is simple. Some of their courses are not equivalent, and in some cases, not even as rigorous as a high school course.

Watchdogging university course and faculty quality has been the jurisdiction of Kansas faculty. For over a decade, departmental chairs and faculty at Kansas universities and community colleges met annually in "Core Competency" meetings. Each year they closely compared courses and curricula. As a result, many community college courses flow seamlessly into four-year programs. Those equivalencies have been clearly defined in "articulation agreements" for decades.

But other courses are not equivalent. Reasons have been clearly detailed in annual Core Competency reports. I participated in these meetings for many years and know those shortcomings in biology.

Cheap courses often use a "baby" textbook. Texts for subjects such as human anatomy and physiology come in both major's and non-major's ("baby") versions. Kansas shouldn't have its nurses trained on the book used to teach high school level anatomy and physiology.

No prerequisites. Microbiology and anatomy and physiology courses at some community colleges lack prerequisites. Their course begins at high school graduation level. But these



John Richard Schrock

- Education Frontlines

advanced courses should start after additional college biology coursework. There is no way a beginning course can take the student to the level of competency of an advanced class.

Cheap course syllabi omit concepts, lacking the coverage and rigor of four-year universities and the more-solid community colleges.

Faculty teaching some courses, especially in more remote community colleges, may be minimally qualified and in some cases do not meet the basic "masters plus 18 hours in teaching field" requirement.

Core Competency reports to the Board of Regents repeatedly stressed that faculty quality should be ensured by peer evaluation. But at some community colleges, an administrator hires off-campus outreach teachers with questionable or weak credentials and without any faculty review. Indeed, the faculty hottest over this issue were on-campus community college professors who realize their reputation is being hurt by this tuition-driven practice.

Other problems arise outside the Core Competency criticisms. Tech schools, whose mission is to train emergency medical technicians, mechanics, etc. — and who have solid faculty with that expertise — are now also allowed to teach general education. Lacking academic faculty, tech school administrators hire retired teachers and others no longer active in

academics. Some even advertise 3-credit-hour general education courses that can be finished in just two weekends, making a mockery of what those college courses should be.

The Board of Regents has also rubber-stamped literally hundreds of out-of-state online courses for Kansas students at its meetings — many of even more questionable value — and under the excuse that the attorney general makes them do it. Therefore it is not a surprise that community colleges and tech schools with weak courses are asking the board to place a "high priority" on forcing the four-year universities to accept the courses that previously have been found to be sub par under the Core Competency process.

Some states adopted this "seamless articulation" over a decade ago. Their academic quality has plummeted, as detailed on the PBS special "Declining by Degrees" available in many libraries. Under seamless articulation, four-year universities realized their unique programs start the junior year. So they hired adjuncts to teach gen ed courses on a per-hour basis. Since hire-a-profs come, teach their course, and leave, the remaining resident faculty must cover double the committee work, advising, research, etc.

By dismissing faculty oversight of course and program quality, standardization mandates will drive courses to the lowest common denominator. Instead of rejecting the low quality courses that are emerging each day, the regents insistence on standardization will rapidly move Kansas to "cheap" teachers, "cheap" courses, and "cheap" degrees. Expensive, but "cheap."

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

