CASE AND COMMENTARY
The Ethics of “Ghost” Surgery
Commentary by Audiey Kao, MD, PhD

Case
George G, a patient complaining of low back pain radiating into his left leg with numbness and tingling of his left foot, consulted Dr. Quimby, a surgeon. Dr. Quimbly recommended that Mr. G undergo corrective surgery. Dr. Quimbly informed Mr. G about risks associated with anesthesia, but did not discuss risk associated with drop foot. Before anesthesia was administered, a nurse came in and handed Mr. G a form, "Consent to Operation, Anesthetics, and Special Procedures." After the surgery, Mr. G developed a drop foot, and Dr. Quimbly recommended that he undergo additional surgery. Mr. G wanted a second opinion and requested his medical records. He learned that because Dr. Quimbly did not arrive on time to perform the surgery, another surgeon had performed the procedure. Mr. G was very upset that Dr. Quimbly had not performed the surgery and that a "ghost surgeon" had been substituted.

Question for Discussion
May a "ghost surgeon" be substituted when the treating surgeon is unavailable?


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