

## ***Virtual Mentor***

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### **CASE AND COMMENTARY**

#### **Being the "Company Doctor"**

Commentary by Faith Lagay, PhD

#### **Case**

For the past 2 years, Mr. Bradford has been working for XYZ Inc. Over the past few months, he feels that he has been denied several promotions and that his superiors do not appreciate his contributions. Consequently, he has been experiencing some work-related stress that has resulted in severe headaches. He sees Dr. X, a family physician retained by his employer. Dr. X believes that Mr. Bradford is suffering from anxiety and depression, and refers him to a psychiatrist. Dr. X divulges this information to Mr. Bradford's employer who places it in his employment file. Mr. Bradford eventually learns about this and complains to his supervisor. His supervisor maintains that the company has a valid interest in knowing this information. Moreover, the supervisor claims that no patient-physician relationship was ever formed, so the doctor had no obligation to maintain confidentiality. Mr. Bradford is incensed about this situation: "Don't doctors swear to some oath that requires them to keep the confidences of their patients?"

#### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Did Dr. X violate the Hippocratic Oath and breach the confidences of Mr. Bradford?
2. In the context of a workplace exam, does Dr. X have any obligations to the employer?

See what the AMA *Code of Medical Ethics* says about this topic in Opinion 5.09 Confidentiality: industry-employed physicians and independent medical examiners. American Medical Association. *Code of Medical Ethics 1998-1999 Edition*. Chicago, IL: American Medical Association; 1998.

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*The people and events in this case are fictional. Resemblance to real events or to names of people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. The viewpoints expressed on this site are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.*

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