

*litor***The Physician as a Spy**

To the Editor:

As a physician practicing in New York State, I have received "Instructions" from Hollis T. Ingraham, M.D., Commissioner of Health, informing me that effective April 1, 1973, "all physicians are required by Section 3372 of the Public Health Law to report to the State Department of Health, promptly, the name and address of any patient he finds an addict or habitual drug user or any narcotic drug defined in Section 3302 of the Law."

If the state wants to register "addicts" and "habitual drug users," it could order them to register themselves. Of course, many might wisely refrain from such self-denunciation. Thus, our lawmakers, evidently taking their Nazi and Communist colleagues as their models, chose what must have seemed to them a more "efficient" way of getting these "patients" registered: namely, by ordering their physicians to denounce them to the authorities. But how would a physician know that a person is an "addict" or "habitual drug user"? Only by having the patient confide this information to him in the traditional expectation — henceforth fatally false — that the patient's confidences would remain his physician's secrets.

I write, then, to protest against this measure I consider another giant step forward in the transformation of the American physician from doctor into detective, from protector of the patient into spy for the state, and to urge The Times, and the press generally, to take appropriate steps to warn the public of the ways in which physicians practicing in New York State (and elsewhere) are required by law to function as secret agents for the government. Only through such publicity can our citizens protect themselves against inadvertent self-incrimination — by deceiving their physicians before their physicians can deceive them.

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Syracuse, March 13, 1973