

# Correspondence

To the Editor:

The closing paragraph of George J. Annas's review of *MEDICOLEGAL ASPECTS OF HOSPITAL RECORDS*, by Emanuel Hayt, [see *MEDICOLEGAL NEWS* 7(1):14] revealed an all too common ignorance about the professional training and activities of a medical record administrator.

A medical record administrator is a graduate of a four year program which must be accredited by the American Medical Association's Commission on Allied Health Education and Accreditation and by the Education and Registration Committee of the American Medical Record Association. After graduation from an approved baccalaureate program, it is necessary for one to successfully complete the national registration examination before one may be called a Medical Record Administrator and use the designation of Registered Record Administrator (RRA).

Included in the accredited program is a course on the legal aspects of health care which includes the legal aspects of medical records. In my experience, no academic course of study involves the use of one reference or source, and there are a number of publications which are used in medical record administration programs. Each student in Medical Record Administration is immediately instructed to ask for the legal handbook for the state in which he or she expects to be employed, and if no handbook exists, that individual is instructed to contact the hospital attorney to establish the statutes under which he or she will be working.

The implication of the review — that legal aspects of medical records should involve only the legal aspects of the finished written document — is a naive perception of what is involved in the compilation of a written document which is admissible in a court of law. The Medical Record Administrator is delegated the responsibility for monitoring the legal aspects of health care delivery. It is the responsibility of the Medical Record Administrator to be alert to suspicion or evidence of malpractice and/or negligence and to call such evidence to the attention of the chief executive officer of the hospital. Since the Board of Trustees has ultimate responsibility for all activity within the health care institution, including the assurance of delivery of quality health care, it is necessary for the Medical Administrator to be cognizant of the organizational structure of the health care facility and the avenues

through which delivery of quality health care is assured.

Mr. Annas should restrict his comments to a review of the publication and avoid assigning characteristics of "ignorance" or "arrogance" to medical record personnel.

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*Mr. Annas replies:*

*I did not intend to imply that all, or even most, medical record administrators are ignorant or arrogant. I do not, however, believe that your assertion that the medical record administrator has "the responsibility for monitoring the legal aspects of health care delivery" will stand scrutiny. In my term of more than three years as Chairman of the Complaint Committee of the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine, the Board has never received a complaint against a physician either from a medical record administrator or from the chief executive officer of a hospital.*

To the Editor:

I direct your attention to the offensive review of my book, entitled *MEDICOLEGAL ASPECTS OF HOSPITAL RECORDS*, by your Editor-in-Chief, George J. Annas (see *MEDICOLEGAL NEWS* 7(1): 14). By way of contrast I would suggest that [readers] read the earlier review of the same book in the *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF LAW & MEDICINE* (vol. 3, no. 4) which described the book as follows:

Clearly written and easily understood, this guidebook should prove to be a practical and useful reference source for hospital medical records personnel and administrators. Coverage encompasses a wide variety of the legal problems and implications of hospital medical records including patients' rights and records.

Among my books is an excellent little paperback by Mr. Annas entitled *The Rights of Hospital Patients* published in 1975. In Mr. Annas's book, six pages are devoted to "Hospital Records." The first two footnotes of the chapter refer to the first edition of my book, published in 1964 under the title *Legal Aspects of Medical Records*.

Curran and Shapiro in their scholarly volume *Law, Medicine and Forensic Sciences* (1970) also cite my earlier book (pp. 68, 69 and 393).

As proof of the poor research of the reviewer, I need quote only his incorrect statement that, "current issues such as procedures for changing inaccurate medical records are not even discussed." Evidently Mr. Annas overlooked pages 35-36 and failed to recall the article published in *MEDICOLEGAL NEWS* (vol. 6, no. 1) by Susan Babin entitled, *Changing Notes in Medical Records: A Proposal*, wherein she states: "The third possibility, adding an addendum is the method recommended by Hayt & Hayt in *Legal Aspects of Medical Records*." Reference is made twice in her article to the 1977 2d. edition of the book in footnotes 29 and 30. Does not Mr. Annas remember that reference 16 of the same article relates to his 1975 opus magnum?

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*Mr. Annas replies:*

*The truth hurts but can no more be termed offensive than the thorns on a rose. The duty of a book reviewer is to call them as he sees them. In my review of Mr. Hayt's book, I pointed to more than 20 specific errors or inadequacies and suggested that the likely reason was that the book was not a text at all, but rather an advertisement for the medical forms marketed by the publisher — The Physician's Record Company. This is not denied. Instead a quotation from an uncritical descriptive summary of the book's contents, which appeared in another journal, is offered, and it is suggested that the citation of the volume by others (including myself) somehow amounted to a wholesale endorsement of the contents that cannot be withdrawn. Indeed, Mr. Hayt challenges only one factual assertion in the review. But the two pages on correction of medical records he cites contain only 17 lines on this subject. The subject deserves a chapter itself in such a volume, and this meager morsel cannot be labeled a "discussion" of the issue. Like medical records, there are some book reviews that need to be corrected. The review of MEDICOLEGAL ASPECTS OF HOSPITAL RECORDS, however, is not one of them.*