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National Survey Indicates Majority of Physician Misconduct Goes Unreported

While many Americans believe they have experienced physician misconduct, relatively few report the misconduct or file a complaint

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 30, 2019) – The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) has released the results of a survey commissioned to measure the prevalence of physician misconduct and public awareness of the work of state medical boards.

According to the survey, commissioned by FSMB and conducted online by The Harris Poll among over 2,000 US adults, nearly one in five (18 percent) of Americans have had an interaction with a physician who they believe was acting unethically, unprofessionally, or providing substandard care –but only one-third (33 percent) of those who believe they experienced unethical, unprofessional, or substandard care reported the misconduct or filed a complaint. And among those who filed a complaint, only 34% took their complaint to a state medical board – the entity responsible for licensing and disciplining physicians. Nearly 7 in 10 Americans (69%) do not know that a state medical board is the best resource to contact first if you have a complaint about a physician’s competence or conduct.

“The results of The Harris Poll survey show that physician misconduct is being underreported, and a majority of Americans do not know where to file a complaint against a physician,” said FSMB President and CEO Humayun Chaudhry, DO, MACP. “This is an opportunity to further educate consumers about the valuable role state medical boards play in these cases and ensure that if and when a patient is mistreated or harmed by a physician, they know to report that incident to their medical board.”

“The FSMB believes it is essential to create a safe environment for reporting, so patients feel comfortable coming forward to boards, while also empowering every member of a health care team to exercise their duty to report misconduct as well,” he said.

Key Findings

Physician Misconduct:

- Nearly 1 in 5 Americans (18%) have experienced an interaction with a physician who they believe was acting unethically, unprofessionally, or providing substandard care
- Women are twice as likely as men to have experienced physician misconduct (24% vs. 12%)
- Among those who have experienced physician misconduct, only one third (33%) reported the interaction or filed a complaint against the physician
- Among those who have experienced physician misconduct, a larger portion of men than women (41% of men vs. 30% of women) reported the physician misconduct
- Of those who did file a complaint or report the physician, only about one third (34%) notified the state medical board – the entity responsible for licensing and disciplining physicians

State Medical Board Awareness:

- Less than 3 in 10 Americans (27%) say they know how to find out if a physician has ever received a disciplinary action against their medical license
- 51% of Americans do not know that state medical boards are responsible for the licensing and regulating of physicians in the United States

In an effort to increase public awareness about the role of state medical boards, the FSMB recently expanded its free physician search tool, [DocInfo.org](https://www.docinfo.org). The new DocInfo emphasizes the importance of reporting incidents of physician misconduct to state medical boards, and explains when, how and where to file a complaint. DocInfo provides professional background information on every licensed doctor in the United States, including:

- Where they attended medical school
- Which states these are licensed to practice in
- What their medical specialty is
- If they have ever been disciplined by a state medical board (date and type of disciplinary action taken)

Survey Method:

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of FSMB from October 5-9, 2018 among 2,018 U.S. adults ages 18 and older, among whom 409 have experienced an interaction with a physician who they believed was acting unethically, unprofessionally or providing substandard care, of which 128 filed a complaint/reported said interaction. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. To learn more about the topline data, key findings and full methodology of The Harris Poll survey, please read the [executive summary](#).

About the Federation of State Medical Boards

The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) is a national non-profit organization representing all medical boards within the United States and its territories that license and discipline allopathic and osteopathic physicians and, in some jurisdictions, other health care professionals. The FSMB serves as the voice for state medical boards, supporting them through education, assessment, research and advocacy while providing services and initiatives that promote patient safety, quality health care and regulatory best practices. To learn more about FSMB, visit www.fsmb.org. You can also follow FSMB on Twitter ([@theFSMB](#)).

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