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## EDITOR'S MESSAGE

By Jack Persico, Editor-in-Chief

# Will Pharma Documentary Be Moore of the Same?

**A**lthough it won't be released until this time next year, Michael Moore's new documentary is already causing an uproar. The provocateur who rose to prominence (some would say infamy) in 2004 with *Fahrenheit 9/11* is now turning his camera on the health care system. Just consider that the film's working title is *Sicko* and you get a pretty good idea of what's to come.



Pundits expect Mr. Moore will try to pin the US's ballooning health care costs largely on the price of medications. To no one's surprise, pharmaceutical manufacturers are in his cross hairs. Several have recently issued instructions to their employees to be on guard against Mr. Moore and his guerrilla tactics.

That's advice you might want to heed as well. Internet scuttlebutt says that Mr. Moore has hired actors to portray drug company reps to take part in attempted "stings," offering doctors a variety of enticements if they agree to prescribe a certain medication. The tactic, however, may fall flat. Most physicians get to know their reps by sight and are likely to be suspicious of any newcomers, particularly any without the proper identification that's becoming the norm. Curiously, at the same time he's looking to entrap physicians, Mr. Moore is also reportedly trying to enlist their help. According to news reports, the filmmaker has offered individual physicians up to \$50,000 to install hidden cameras in their offices to give him footage of drug company sales tactics.

Although filming hasn't yet been completed, Mr. Moore is already working the talk show circuit, making typically inflammatory comments about drug company secretiveness and other items to be covered in his film. Perhaps as a conciliatory move, perhaps not, earlier this month four major pharmaceutical manufacturer associations announced a voluntary agreement to make clinical trial data more easily accessible (available at [www.phrma.org](http://www.phrma.org)). Whether or not that can take the starch out of Mr. Moore remains to be seen.

He certainly won't be lacking for material. With the \$400 billion Medicare prescription drug benefit set to go into effect in 2006, the ongoing (and worsening) medical malpractice crisis, the increase in the number of Americans who lack health insurance, the FDA in the midst of rethinking the safety of COX-2 inhibitors, and Canadian drug reimportation an increasingly hot potato among politicians, the film could just as easily be called *The Perfect Storm*.

These are but a few important issues that deserve thoughtful and objective discussion. But my guess is that Mr. Moore will hew to the themes of his previous efforts and cast the film as a government giveaway of tax dollars to big pharma for products that are unsafe and/or unnecessary. In fact, he's already toeing that line. "Being screwed by your HMO and ill-served by pharmaceutical companies is the shared American experience," Mr. Moore told *The Detroit News* in December. "The system, inferior to that of much poorer nations, benefits the few at the expense of the many." Here's hoping *Sicko* won't do the same. **PN**

*Jack Persico*