

A Call to Action

I hope that all of you had a wonderful holiday season and that the New Year is off to a good start. Over the next year it will be my opportunity to comment on some of the topics of concern and interest to a lot of us. First I would like to thank our exiting President, John W. Bass, M.D. for his eloquent efforts in the past year. The demands on his time have been enormous and we praise him for them.

A little background for those of you who don't know me. I was born and raised in Belleville, Illinois (population 37,500 – still 37,500). My father was a General Surgeon (University of Tennessee Medical School, class of 1927) and a decorated veteran for his surgical services in World War II. My mother is a certified nurse anesthetist (Creighton University) who gave a lot of anesthesia for the wounded in World War II. "I wonder how they got together?" My best friend, my wife Kathleen has her masters' degree in Nursing (St. Louis University, BSN University of Illinois, MS 1980) and taught critical care nursing in Chicago where we met. I graduated from Loyola Stritch School of Medicine in 1977 and did my Residency at the University of Illinois Eye and Ear Infirmary. I joined Dr. Wertz and Dr. Nutley in practice in July of 1981 and have practiced on the same block for the past 20 years. As you can see medicine has deep roots in my family and I have heard and seen all the changes up front my whole life. My dad fought against the formation of Medicare and Blue Cross and Blue Shield as he felt it was bad for patients and a bad foreboding for medicine – (there is a lot there for editorialization!)

I remember as a child when my father was in turmoil over having to raise his office visits from seven dollars to eight dollars and fifty cents. He was definitely a man who cherished his independence over money. It is fond to reminisce about the past but we must look forward. That being said, I think a lot of the past. A time when better care was provided to patients and was certainly more gratifying for physicians. I believe those times can be recaptured and are worthy of the effort, although it is great. Removing a lot of the layers of unnecessary and burdensome legislation is certainly a priority. Foremost, however, on our agenda at the present time is to prevent some destructive and intrusive legislation that is before us.

The 2002 Medicare physician pay cut, a 5.4% across-the-board cut to physicians is outrageous. Please, just contact your legislators!!! If you don't know who to call, contact the Maricopa County Medical Society or The Arizona Medical Association and we will be glad to head you in the right direction to make sure your voice is heard.

The second impending fiasco is the HIPAA Privacy Regulations. Dr. Bass touched on these in one of his editorials as well. The projected cost of compliance with HIPAA is anywhere between \$16,000 to \$23,000 per office! Spending some money now to prevent this monstrosity would be better than cowering and spending money to be "compliant" like a good little doctor. Don't expect the AMA to do the work for you. The AMA CPT codes are to be a prominent feature of the transaction codes set. What is in it for the AMA? Tens of millions of dollars in revenue. One United States senator estimated that the AMA grosses over 70 million dollars per year from it's CPT monopoly. Where are they in the fight for a reduction in the price cut from Medicare and helping to help eradicate/prevent HIPAA? They're strangely too silent for me. It is up to each of us. Once again I urge you to contact your legislators and let them know your feelings, please call before it is too late!

See you next month.

Mark E. Baldree, M.D.
President