

## Combat Yellow Journalism

*“Health insurance premiums going up 20%!”*

*“Health care problems worry Arizonans!”*

*“Local doctors accused . . .”*

*“Medicare recipients unable to find physicians . . .”*

In all the articles of these headlines mentioned above I noticed something. It was an epiphany in which I suddenly became saddened and outraged simultaneously. Not one physician or physician group was queried or asked to respond! Wouldn't you love to be able to reply to these types of headlines and give them *your* physician rebuttal?

Recently I had spent some time with a health benefits coordinator of a large Arizona entity and when the topic of increasing health insurance premiums came up I heard him say, “I would think that some of that increase would certainly filter down to the physicians.” Boy, talk about an opening! The other physician and I that were in the group took it upon ourselves to educate the lad. It took us about fifteen minutes of unrelenting educational tactics to make him see the light. Nonetheless, we were successful.

This type of erroneous thinking on his behalf is not uncommon and the public quite often distills this impression from the media and the press. This is also the reason why we as physicians need to respond and reveal the truth behind the yellow journalism.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century the newspapers commonly reported the editor's interpretation of the news rather than objective journalism. In order to increase circulation, the newspapers often exploited their position by pursuing an irresponsible approach to news reporting that became known as “yellow journalism.” Even a century later, this practice still continues to a degree in newspapers, magazines, and television.

Your Medical Society Board members have perceived this need to respond and reveal the truth and have devised an initial model which we hope will be a good vehicle for rapid responses to adverse or erroneous headlines and other relevant issues. The following is the Maricopa County Medical Society Physician Response Outline:

- Information regarding healthcare issues, physician related issues, or issues pertaining to medicine are received by the Medical Society.
  - Receipt from fellow physician (member or otherwise).
  - Receipt from published articles or media (i.e. newspapers, TV, news alerts).
- The Maricopa County Medical Society staff formulates a response.
  - Written responses will be timely and state a purpose and point in defense of or pertaining to physicians and medicine.
- Written responses will be forwarded to the President of the Medical Society for editing and approval.
- Upon approval, response will be forwarded to a Board member physician in that particular specialty if necessary. For general comments and responses, any Board member may participate.

- Selected physician will edit, approve and sign letter.
- Response will be submitted to the appropriate media for publication on behalf of the Maricopa County Medical Society.

I believe that this could become an important community resource. The public will be able to hear from the people that actually deliver the health care that everyone is so concerned about. (What a novel idea! Do you think the newspapers would ever think of this concept?)

I know that within our physician community we have a lot of talented, knowledgeable, media-worthy types that can clearly speak and/or correspond for us. I see it on display daily in the physician lounges. So here is your opportunity to be heard and do something for yourself and your medical community. The public is thirsty for our opinions. Our thoughts and ideas can help shape community feelings and sway support where it should be. Let us be heard!!

One last **BIG** item. In the US House of Representatives there currently is a bill on national tort reform. This bill would supercede state law and accomplish what we have been trying to do on a state level for at least twenty years. It is HR4600 and is known by the acronym HEALTH. This legislation will overturn the plaintiff bar argument that state constitutions prohibit limits on damage awards.

This is huge for us as we have tried three times in the last twenty years to get this done on a state level and have been unsuccessful. This is our big chance, so pull out your old *Round-up* (May 2002 issue) or log on to [www.medical-society.com](http://www.medical-society.com), find your representative and call, write and urge them to support it. Then do it again. When it gets to the Senate, then do the same. This is necessary to not only decrease the cost of our malpractice insurance, but to address the problems of cost, availability, and access to care that will continue to get worse if it does not pass.

**SO LET'S GET OUT THERE!!**

See you next month.

**Mark E. Baldree, M.D.**  
**President**