

NEW YEAR – OLD CHALLENGES

Happy New Year and here we go off on a new year. It is my honor to serve you this year as the Society President and would first like to congratulate Dr. Suresh Anand for his excellent guidance of our ship through last year's unsettled waters. We appreciate his wisdom and leadership. I would love to have a committee of past presidents to occasionally meet and give guidance to the Society. Their knowledge of the past battles would help prepare for the new threats.

For at least the last four years, the president's slot has been filled with the offspring of a physician. My grandfather practiced 50 years in Boone, Iowa and only had to concentrate on patient care. There was no Medicare, HCFA, Blue Cross, HMO's, privacy rules, lawsuits or even an IRS. His five sons all practiced medicine and saw these changes affect their ability to provide inexpensive quality care. The uninsured were cared for by the county hospital system where good care was provided often overseen by medical schools. We had attendings, fellows, residents, interns and medical students all learning while serving. It was a good system and funded locally. Private hospitals were excellent and also locally run. I recall a patient who was formerly an administrator in Kansas who claimed that basically he, the chief of staff and the chief nurse administered the hospital. A far cry from today where dozens of staff simply fill out forms which interfere with patient care and certainly run up costs.

One reason I chose dermatology was that it was an outpatient practice and therefore somewhat less affected by the government inspired chaos at hospitals. Still we see the government come in, set our fees, determine appropriate treatment, tell us how to speak, how to hire and fire and who knows what else.

It is simple for me to see why we need each other in medicine. The local medical societies must represent the membership. This is important since our national AMA seems to have its own agenda and forgets who it should work for. Heaven knows what is really in this new Medicare law and how it will affect the practicing physician.

The county and state organizations however work closely together and I have seen how effective they are representing us. Every year crazy bills are introduced to which they deal with them without our even knowing of the threat. I strongly urge, especially the younger members, to join and be active in the Society. I would also strongly encourage all of our membership to join the Arizona Medical Association as there is strength in numbers. We can all accomplish much more than we realize.

We still have the pleasure and reward of caring for our patients. We are really the only patient advocate and we have to work for them as well as ourselves.

Bryan R. Updegraff, M.D.
President