

STRENGTH IN UNITY

The problem of medical liability is coming to a boil. Spurred by higher settlements, which now average over one million dollars, essentially all malpractice carriers have withdrawn from Arizona leaving only M.I.C.A. Those who were insured by St. Paul and others are scrambling on the secondary market and paying rates higher than they can afford. Premiums in some cases have risen several hundred percent. M.I.C.A. has increased rates 17% and expects further increases in the next and subsequent years. High risk physicians are especially vulnerable and are being dropped. Since there are only doctors who have been sued and those who will be sued, we are all in the same creaky boat.

The temperature in this pot is approaching the boiling point. The fire was lit in Yuma earlier this year with a crisis involving emergency room physicians when their premiums tripled. Next was the Tucson pediatric surgeons' loss of coverage, which sparked a "crisis" Town Hall meeting in April. Nearly 700 physicians attended this meeting chaired by Leonard Ditmanson, MD (President of the Pima County Medical Society) and attended by Congressmen Shadegg and Kolbe, MICA's Chairman James Carland, MD and ArMA's legal counsel Barry Halpern. Myself and other representatives of the Maricopa County Medical Society also attended to lend support and let them all know that their neighbors to the north are with them.

Dr. Ditmanson did a valiant job of controlling the frustration and anger demonstrated by the medical community. The key to our success in this effort is to channel this energy in concert with the entire state medical community to effect change. In unity, there is strength and to this end we are arranging a statewide "liability crisis" evening in the upcoming months. Efforts are under way to unite the state association, Pima County Medical Society, Yuma County Medical Society, specialty societies, and all physicians in the state of Arizona to come together, participate and produce results. It will not be an easy road ahead, but if we all stick together and be smart about it we can overcome. We need a tremendous turnout and with the heat from Tucson and Yuma, hopefully we can awake the state elected officials to the crisis of availability of care. Efforts are under way to demand the attention of our elected officials who are pro-medicine and rally behind them while opposing officials who are not friends of healthcare reform. Involving everyone, physicians and our officials that represent us is a leading step in the right direction. Patient involvement is critical as well. Rid your waiting rooms of all periodicals and replace them with only articles and magazines regarding the medical liability crisis. When they ask why? Tell them. Tell them that if nothing is done, your availability to see them is in jeopardy.

Although a dermatologist is a "safe" specialty, I care as much as anybody in this pot since we all need care readily available, especially in the areas of peril (ob/gyn, emergency medicine, neurosurgery, neonatal care, pediatric and orthopedic surgery). We will ask for key elected officials and press to attend, however we cannot emphasize enough the importance of your attendance. Now is the time to stand and be counted and maybe yell a little too!

LET'S ROLL!

Bryan Updegraff, M.D.
President