

Focus

Lest you fear I have decided to change subjects to something other than liability reform, rest assured that the focus has not changed. There was a time when the AMA was considered the most powerful lobby in Washington. Today it is not in the top ten, yet the most powerful lobby for the Democrat party is the trial lawyer's association. The most influential lobby for the Republicans is the NRA. The reason for this is simply focus. The trial lawyers care only for their member's interests and the NRA concentrates only on infringement on the second amendment. In the meantime the AMA might be into supposed global warming or if gays should be Boy Scout leaders.

The issue of medical liability reform is the focus of practicing physicians because if it is not promptly and properly addressed there will be no practicing physicians (at least in the fields of primary care, emergency medicine, obstetrics, neurosurgery and orthopedics). Since I don't feel dermatologists should deliver babies nor do neurosurgery, we need to act together now.

The leadership for this fight has been taken up by the Doctors for Medical Liability Reform (www.protectpatientsnow.org) and they are working to educate the public as well as physicians on the crisis. Their political efforts are attempting to change the make-up of the US Senate by concentrating on the close elections in the states of Washington, North Carolina and South Dakota. If the doctors strongly support a victorious candidate in each state, they will go a long way toward the reform we need at the same time re-establishing physicians as politically strong players. We also will be doing a lot for our patients since we are really their only advocate.

Our progress since last month's letter is encouraging. Senator Daschle's (D-SD) tight race has already changed him into a new conservative (at least until election day). If you would like to support his opponent (Congressman John Thune) and can act quickly, his next fundraiser is at Frank Sinatra's house in Palm Springs on May 8th. If you miss this but would like to attend others contact Mr. Barron Thomas at 480-951-8207. On the local scene thanks to the valiant efforts of State Senator Barbara Leff (R-PV), we now have as law in Arizona the requirement for an expert to certify merit to a malpractice suit before it can be filed. Senator Leff is also responsible for many of the pro-physician legislation that you now benefit from. Her support and hard work for, not only the community but especially, the medical community is unparalleled. The Arizona Medical Association has valiantly formed task forces to begin to analyze and gear up for tort reform. Membership to both your county and state associations is the wisest choice you'll ever make. Much of the legislative movements are done through the lobbyists of ArMA. Your support of both organizations only makes us stronger.

I wonder though if an "expert" gives false or incompetent testimony, whether they could not be held responsible before a medical board. Practicing physicians are certainly held accountable so why not hired guns?

We have a good start on our journey but we must keep pushing!

See you next month!

Bryan Updegraff, M.D.
President