

Tempus Fugit

The mythological Roman deity Janus, for whom the month January is named, is said to have two faces. One face looks forward to the New Year and the other looks upon the past year's events. We now arrive at that juncture in the passage of time once again. This is my final installment in our journal as your president and I'd like to take the opportunity to not only dwell upon the issues of the past but more importantly to look to the future.

First and foremost I would like to express my sincere thanks to the members of our board of directors who gave of their time this year and for their valuable support and advice. These dedicated physicians are elected by their peers and donate their time for the benefit of all the physicians of our medical society. They receive no compensation. They deserve our respect and gratitude. Looking forward to the future I hope at some point that the society could provide some minimal stipend to officers and board members. Their talents should not be expropriated without some form of compensation. Medical staff committee appointments are paid positions. The work benefits the hospitals yet is paid for by medical staff dues. Shouldn't the work directly benefiting one's peers have equal value?

We began the year with the lingering vigor of a successful rally at the Phoenix Civic Plaza. The energy of that meeting and fervor for tort reform however, seems to have faded. The issue has not. This remains a passionate issue. The survival of medical practice as we know it in our state depends on meaningful reform. The nature of that reform will be debated shortly and professional political consultants selected by ARMA will be asking many of you and the public we serve for opinions as to the most efficient and most appealing way meaningful reforms can be enacted. A frontal assault on the state constitution seems now less likely but several options do exist that will lower liability premiums and preserve access to care for our citizens. One certain outcome will be that the physician community must embrace this effort without reservation and open their wallets with equal abandon. Massive financial support by *doctors* (not insurers, hospitals, or business) is the only way this will be a successful campaign.

As I look to the immediate future however, I fear that the biggest dilemma we face comes not from Arizona trial lawyers but from our elected officials in Washington. A 4.4% cut in Medicare reimbursement looms in January and an approximately 26% reduction over the next five years is forecast. What small business could sustain this blow while the costs of employees, benefits, paper, liability, gasoline, and supplies continues to escalate? In a state with a large elderly population I can foresee nothing other than physicians taking the same action any prudent businessman or woman would do in like circumstances. There will be a drastic reduction of medical services available to Medicare recipients. Who can afford to maintain the necessities of a medical office in the face of these drastic reductions in compensation? As we have learned from past experience, natural as well as man-made disasters, it is only a crisis that brings change in our country. The elderly will suffer at the hands of their elected officials through administrative fiat; forged by the outmoded "sustainable growth" formula that binds the actions of CMS. Physicians are not "healthcare food stamps" to be doled out by the

politicians in Washington. Medical care has a cost and good care may cost more. I fear we're about to find out what the price in human terms will be for lack of foresight at the highest levels of government. The disruption in medical services wrought by tropical storms will pale in comparison to the havoc that will follow implementation of these proposed cuts. I must leave you with this pessimistic but realistic assessment of our future.

It has been an honor to be of service to you, my esteemed colleagues, during this past year. I look forward to continuing to serve my profession on local, state and, national levels in the future. As always, I am anxious to hear from my peers on matters of concern to our profession, and to offer suggestions and support to the best of my ability to all who would inquire. I wish my successor, Dr. Barbara Berry, good fortune as she assumes this position and urge you to be involved and supportive during her tenure. Lastly, in looking back on how all of us arrived at this point in our professional careers, I take everlasting pride in the sacrifice and dedication that grants each of us the privilege to be called "doctor."

See you next month,

Marc J. Rosen, M.D.
President