

“After the Storm”

I was approached recently by one of our Society's past officers who admitted that he had actually read my writings appearing in this publication. I was, of course, flattered that anyone read these ramblings let alone expressed a favorable opinion as to the content. Our colleague went on to remark how the themes expressed in the “Round-Up” today closely mirrored the concerns, issues and, political intrigues of more than a decade earlier. It seems that we think we arrive at answers yet the same questions continue to be asked. Are the doctors of today more accomplished in dealing with their travail, more politically and economically savvy? What has “organized medicine” accomplished?

I often wonder if our professional societies actually spend too much time agonizing over our fate at the hands of managed care, government regulation and, the plaintiff's bar. Perhaps if we spent more time emphasizing the positive role of the physician within our society, exploiting the accomplishments of the medical community we would recognize a leap in stature in not only the public's perception but also temper the burden of regulation and criminalization of the medical profession. Maybe “organized medicine” needs to wave a banner more and point an accusing finger a bit less in support of our profession.

Such is the case in the course of recent current events. By the time you read this, memories of the natural disasters that befell the gulf coast in late August and September will have faded. The TV news stories that were a 24-hour marathon event during hurricanes Katrina and Rita are likely now reduced to passing mention. After these events I wrote a “letter to the editor” that was published in the West Valley edition of *The Arizona Republic*. The point of my writing was to emphasize that the news item likely be lost in the days to follow disasters of nature and that witnessed on 9/11, were the exploits of heroism, dedication, and selfless professionalism demonstrated by doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel. As hospitals were threatened by the storm and subsequently by looters and criminals, these dedicated professionals stood their posts, tending to the weak and infirm entrusted to their care. A few news stories surfaced about their plight. Where are they now?

Imagine having your office inundated with two feet of stagnant, disease-laden water. Your office records and computer system destroyed. The operating room contaminated by a damp, unsanitary rubble pile. Your patients scattered about the country trying to piece their lives together, no way to refill a prescription, have a dressing looked after or to contact their physician. The office rent continues to come due, there are malpractice premiums to be paid, and your staff cannot be found. Yet with the outlook for a return to their professional lives diminishing daily many of our colleagues stayed at their posts providing what care they could, helping in evacuation efforts and, exercising leadership within their storm-shattered communities. These are the stories that “organized medicine” needs to tell.

Yes we'd like to have tort reform. We all feel that managed care organizations are intruding into the doctor-patient relationship, fixing prices and, tearing asunder the fabric of private medical practice. Those themes don't vanish after decades of effort. The very

real sacrifice of dedicated physicians in time of public need however, seems relegated to page two while our professional societies address our rather self serving agenda in the light of public opinion. Shouldn't we make an effort to educate the public on our strength with equal vigor to that expressing the weaknesses in medical care today?

I ask that if you have personal knowledge of colleagues who have faced these types of situations and by their actions reaffirmed the nobility of our profession speak loudly and publicly of them. Submit these stories to our medical society so that we can publicly acknowledge them on these pages rather than continue to only complain of those circumstances over which we seem to have exercised little control in the past. I am often asked if I had to choose my profession again would I follow the same path. I never hesitate to respond in the affirmative. After reading and hearing of the sacrifice of many of my colleagues when faced with such catastrophes of nature or those wrought by man I am ever more proud to be sharing their profession.

See you next month.

Marc J. Rosen, M.D.
President