



The Common Thread

EDWARD J. DONAHUE, M.D.

Weather forecasting in Arizona may be fairly predictable; however, physicians' response to critical issues that directly affect them is much more difficult to forecast.

The Democratic Senator from Michigan, Debbie Stabenow, introduced legislation on March 14, 2008 entitled the "Save Medicare Act (s.2785)." This legislation proposes to replace the scheduled 16% decrease in Medicare reimbursement with a modest fee schedule increase in July, 2009.

Specialty societies like the American College of Surgeons, the American Society of Breast Surgeons and many others, including, the AMA, ARMA and your own Medical Society sent e-mails to their members, with easy to follow instructions – which allowed a physician, with two or three mouse clicks – to send a letter to their United States Senators, urging their co-sponsorship and support of this extremely important legislation. My informal polling of approximately 100 physicians in Central Phoenix revealed a less than enthusiastic response to this e-mail alert. Responding to these e-mail alerts is simple enough that I believe I could train Peepers, our cat, to do so. All kidding aside, all you need to do is Google "Senator Michigan Save Medicare Act" and you will find our Web page: www.mcmsonline.com – Maricopa County Medical Society – listed in the top ten links to this query.

The merry month of May has arrived, temperatures will be soaring into the 100's, saguaro cacti will be covered with blossoms, and a new fiscal year will herald continued decreases in Medicare reimbursement.

**Can Summer be far away?
Probably Not.**

You can also follow the link to www.mcmsonline.com and easily make your voice heard. You could even bypass step one and go directly to our Web site.

Used properly, the Internet can be a powerful communication tool. We could communicate with all of our membership immediately if we had your e-mail addresses. I am asking all readers of this editorial to go to their computer, visit our Web site at www.mcmsonline.com and sign up in the "members only" section. You will automatically be signed up to receive our e-newsletter, *InforMed Society*. Remember, your e-mail address will not be sold or shared with any commercial entity.

Recent news stories revealed two disturbing trends. Two different manufacturers of very expensive cholesterol lowering drugs withheld scientific data from studies about their two biggest money making products for more than two years. Why? Because the studies showed that while the drugs lowered cholesterol levels, they failed to prevent heart attacks. Sales of these two drugs alone have exceeded \$5 billion!!

The second piece in the *Wall Street Journal* described the efforts of two rival medical product companies to aggressively market their controversial weight reducing bands to patients and surgeons alike in an effort to increase their market share. Why? The companies have decided that the banding procedure will be the next big thing in elective surgery (no pun intended), even though many respected bariatric surgeons have openly questioned the efficacy of the banding procedure.

"I cannot believe that a physician's decision regarding specific drugs or procedures can be so easily swayed.

How did we lose control of our destiny?"

The common thread here is the continued influence by industry upon the actions of physicians. What ever happened to physicians being the driving force

in new procedures and medications? I cannot believe that a physician's decision regarding specific drugs or procedures can be so easily swayed. How did we lose control of our destiny?

I recently spoke with Dr. Don Paxton, an internist in Central Phoenix, who raised a great issue regarding the huge challenges that impact primary care physicians today. He pointed out correctly that it is becoming increasingly difficult for these physicians to deal with the disparities in reimbursement.

The *New York Times* had a wellwritten piece last month which clearly addressed these issues and also addressed the widening gap in supply and demand for primary care physicians. The article correctly stated that primary care physicians are at the lower end of the medical income scale. In states like Arizona and Massachusetts, where reimbursement is extremely low, some physicians are earning significantly less than \$70,000 after twenty plus years of practice.

One internist recently joked that she was going to retrain as a nurse practitioner so she could increase salary to more than six figures and work only forty hours per week.

When and if universal health coverage occurs, more patients will be insured but there will be less doctors available to care for them. This issue is extremely important to all physicians, primary care and specialists alike.

Contact your representatives in Arizona and in Washington. Let them know what is on your mind, and make them aware of the far reaching consequences of the continued deterioration in our health care systems. Get those fact sheets together for your patients. Their healthcare is at risk. If one person contacted two persons, and two persons contacted four persons..., well you get the idea. However, we cannot accomplish change in this arena by ourselves or with the support of our patients. Policymakers in Washington must also hear from OUR national societies, OUR specialty societies, and OUR state societies. The people who make these decisions must hear from all of the players at the table.

The Medical Society will spend the second half of the year addressing six important issues facing physicians here in Maricopa County. A significant

part of each monthly board meeting will be devoted to these topics. If you have a topic you would like to suggest to be included, let me know. You can contact me at edonahue@mcmsonline.com

Lastly, the Medical Society will be hosting an evening at the Phoenix Art Museum on Thursday, May 22, 2008. You should already have received an invitation. Save the date! RSVP and attend. Read the details regarding this event on page 9 in this issue. Please contact me with your thoughts, and join our blog by signing up to the members only section of our website. Go to www.mcmsonline.com (sign up – it's free), and then select the Blog tab at the top.

Edward J. Donahue, M.D.
President



**To us, non-healing wounds are just wounds that haven't healed yet...
...but they will.**

We bring together the latest technology and the most caring staff of wound experts to focus on "non-healing" wounds.

Extend your expertise without expanding your office.
The Wound Healing Center at Chandler Regional Medical Center is the only facility in Arizona to be awarded UHMS accreditation.



*To schedule an appointment for your patient, call the Wound Healing and Hyperbaric Oxygen Center at Chandler Regional Medical Center **480.728.3701***