

Leaders in Change

Labor Day has passed, and our children have returned to school. The Democrats, meeting in Denver have anointed Mr. Obama and the Republicans, in Minneapolis, have done the same for Mr. McCain. The rising and setting sun is shining in our eyes on our way to and from work, and, you guessed correctly, the Autumnal equinox is rapidly approaching! The sun's apparent path of motion will cross the equator on September 21, as it travels towards the Tropic of Cancer in December. Like the Sun, health care reform and our very survival as physicians continues to travel south. I remain concerned that unlike the Sun, we shall never reverse the downward spiral.

During the summer, we witnessed the power of special interest groups to influence Republican senators to not support legislation to prevent the 10.6% cut in the Medicare fee schedule. The posturing of many Republicans was blatant. Thankfully, the U S Senate, led by Mr. Ted Kennedy, passed veto-proof legislation which avoided a **calamity** for both Medicare recipients and private practice physicians. We are certainly not out of the woods – a 21% fee cut is scheduled in eighteen months. We cannot trust insurance companies or the government to protect our interests. The last time I checked I did not see any health care CEO's or politicians who faced a government mandated 21% salary cut. Tremendous work lies ahead to achieve a more sensible reimbursement system for physicians that are not so heavily weighted to procedural reimbursement. Cognitive services reimbursement must be raised to levels to allow physicians in the non-procedural specialties to achieve some degree of parity.

The health plans offered by the major candidates offer reveal stark differences. One plan expands the role of government to provide universal health care for children, but not adults, funded primarily by the elimination of tax cuts. The competing plan will attempt to make insurance more affordable. Does the word oxymoron come to mind? Flaws exist in both plans-the common ground is that physicians have not been invited to the table to participate in the formulation of a sensible, achievable solution.

Robert Laszewski, the president of Health Policy and Strategy Associates has created a blog, "Health Care Policy and Marketplace Review." The link to this blog is easily reached with a few clicks on your computer. Any search engine will take you there. (<http://www.healthpolicyandmarket.blogspot.com/>) A recent post stated that health care reform cannot occur without physician payment reform, and that there will not be payment reform unless physicians lead the way. Overly idealistic? Probably. We must become the leaders in change, rather than reactive to the blueprints of special interest groups.

I still believe that when everything has been said and done, indisputable facts remain. As physicians, we have the privilege of taking care of our patients. We have the ability to diagnose and treat. We have the ability to make an incredible difference in our patient's lives. No one can ever take these wonderful gifts away from us.

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Your Medical Society is planning a social gathering in October. Stay tuned to Round-up for additional details regarding this event.

Summer is ending. I hope you took the time to relax, get away from work and enjoy time with your family.

Warm regards.

Edward J. Donahue, M.D.
President