Wow!! What an incredible start to a great year. Ok that may be a little presumptuous, but I can say without a doubt that it has been a great year so far for our El Paso County Medical Society. We had a fun-filled successful induction of our new officers on the evening of January 18. It included great entertainment with Mario Otero from La Guitarra studios, a visit from Bruce Malone current president of the TMA, and a wonderful presentation by FEMAP founder Ms. Guadalupe de la Vega. We were all inspired by his philanthropic efforts.

I want to express a special thank you to Dr. Jose Aun for his leadership this past year as president of our society. He did an excellent job keeping us abreast of this year’s Texas legislative session and its potential impact on our practices. In addition, he sustained the perpetual fight to get SGR repealed.

Over the weekend of January 27 and 28, we presented a solid contingent at TMA Winter Conference. Those members in attendance included Drs. L. Ureña, A. Enríquez, D. Palacios, R. Raudales, R. Tyroch, C. Handal, D. Mansfield, M. Acosta, P. Pazmiño and myself. In addition, we had six very interested Medical Students. I thank all of you for taking the time and effort on behalf of our colleagues and patients. Our Border Health Caucus drew some important representatives from all over the TMA. All of this demonstrates and confirms the pertinence and significance of the EPCMS to the physicians it represents and to the rest of Texas. Together we can continue to be a powerful force, but we need the involvement of our physician members. Obviously, involvement goes beyond sending an annual check for dues, but I’ll get to that later.

I would like to update you on some things I learned at the TMA conference. It was eye opening and concerning. Many of you may be acutely aware of the changes in medicine coming down the pike, or many of you may not be aware at all. It is certainly easy to get caught up in our busy practices, and lose track of what is happening politically. However, rest assured there are changes coming soon, changes that will have a significant impact on your practice.

The 2011 Texas legislative session was brutal. Many cuts were made, and Medicare/Medicaid was not spared. The option for dual eligibility fell upon the chopping block. For those of you (most of us in El Paso), who have a high volume of these patients with dual eligibility, that can be a 20% cut in reimbursement. That may be a cut your practice cannot afford.

SGR (sustainable growth rate) is still the elephant in the room that will not go away. It has been on our agenda for repeal in our President’s commentaries dating back to 2007. Currently, the required cut in Medicare reimbursement based upon the formula is about 29%. Make no mistake this is a problem that has to be fixed once and for all, and the AMA and TMA are committed to the elimination of SGR this year.

Finally, what I call the AOM’s (abbreviations of medicine), SGR, ACO, EHR, HIE, ICD-10, and more, that we have to deal with. I cannot go into detail about these AOM’s in this editorial. However, each of these by itself can mean a monumental change and expense in your practice, but one you will most likely have to make. One of our tasks here at the EPCMS is to be a resource you can tap into to help you understand these rules and requirements, and to help you implement them into your practice as best as you can.

Ultimately, we need your practice not only to survive but to flourish. The EPCMS needs your involvement in the politics of medicine to survive and flourish. We must work together in a symbiotic fashion. This is in the best interest to the citizens of El Paso...our patients.

This will be an exciting and interesting year to say the least, and I am looking forward to serving as your EPCMS president.
**Winter Conference 2012**

Ten physicians leaders and six students from the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine joined together at the recent TMA winter conference held in Austin Jan. 27-28, 2012. Many participate in committees and councils that join colleagues from area of the state. Some of the “hot topics” discussed were: the Implementation of ICD-10, Social Media, Medicaid Dual Eligibles, SGR, Candidate Selection, HIE, REC and many, many other issues facing physicians and their practices.

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Dr. Gilbert Handal - Committee on Medicaid, Child and Adolescent Committee, Task Force for Medicaid, CHIP and the Uninsured, Infectious Disease Committee, Delegation Chair, Border Health Caucus, Public Health Council
Dr. David Mansfield - El Paso County Medical Society Treasurer, Border Health Caucus, Alternate Delegate

We appreciate your time, attention and commitment to your colleagues and medicine.