New Year, New Mission, New Vision

Patricio A. Pazmiño, Ph.D, M.D.
President, El Paso County Medical Society

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to serve as the new El Paso County Medical Society (EPCMS) President for 2013. This year is going to be a challenging one, because of the economy, Obamacare and the uncertainties of the “sequester plans”. Thus, I will give you an update of our activities and pertinent information that our members should be aware:

Texas Medical Board Rules CME: This was our first activity on Jan 19, 2013 at Providence Memorial Hospital auditorium. Dan Ballard JD described eloquently rules you may not know—but should. It was a complete success, the two auditoriums were full. Most important, the EPCMS members that attended saved the usual $150 registration fee, got 2.5 free CME credits and will be able to deduct up to 3% or $1000 when they renew the malpractice insurance with Texas Medical Liability Trust (TMLT).

Obamacare: Also known as The Accountable Care Act (ACA) is the law of the Land. The Supreme Court deemed ACA constitutional and even though 27 state governors fiercely opposed, several state governors have changed their position including New Mexico, Nevada, Missouri, California and Florida. Governor Rick Perry reiterated in a recent visit to Arizona that he will not expand Medicaid services in Texas. His concern is that expanding the program would bankrupt Texas. However, pressure is mounting from several groups to accept the estimated 100 billion dollars the ACA may bring to Texas over the next ten years. The question we should ask is how he plans to provide care to more than 1 million uninsured Texans and fix the Medicaid without the ACA money.

Red Tape & Bureaucracy: This remains a continuous problem. I complained about this at our recent February TMA winter meeting in Austin. I provided specific details about the lengthy and arduous Medicaid contract and the endless medicine changes, prior authorizations and substitutions required by insurances for approval. We advocated for you in several committees and issues with Dr. David, Palafox, Dr Luis Urrea, Dr. Gilbert Handal, Dr. Jose M De la Rosa, Dr. Manuel Acosta, Dr. Fernando Raudales, Dr. David Mansfield, Dr. Angel Rios, Dr. Roxanne Tyroch and were assisted in our efforts by Patsy Slaughter, our executive director. Thanks are due to all of them for their hard work, dedication and efforts.

Town & Gown Issues: At the EPCMS we are strong supporters of our local institutions including UTEP, EPCC, University Medical Center (UMC) and Paul Foster School of Medicine (PF SOM). We were surprised to find out the recent UMC’s Board of Managers plans to request 162-millions tax bond to establish four outpatient clinics in El Paso. We sent you a survey on this matter and it is very important to get your input on this issue. As I mentioned at our installation ceremony, we need accountability from everyone including UMC in view of the hundreds of millions dollars they are receiving as part of the 1115 waiver. Please read details on Dr Snyder’s comments (President of Dallas County Medical Society) on prior issue of El Paso Physician. We hope to hear from you so we can act accordingly and follow our recently approved mission at EPCMS “advance the art and science of medicine, protect the physician and serve the patient”.

Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) Cuts: The much-hated SGR cuts that aim to control spending on physician services have not been solved in the past decade. Congress passed recently legislation to postpone the 27% yearly cut and imposed on us additional taxes when they passed legislation to fix the “fiscal cliff”. The new estimate from the Congressional Budget Office is that the cost of permanently replacing the flawed Medicare SGR physician payment formula is 138 billion dollars. This is 100 billion less than the previous projection—which is welcome news.

Hopefully, when the US troops are withdrawn from Afghanistan, part of the money can be allocated to fix this problem for good. The American Medical Association (AMA) wants to replace the SGR with a new system that “encourages quality care while reducing costs” and is proposing several principles and a transition plan. An accountable care organization (ACO) model is being suggested but recent studies do not support this model. Many of us had a painful experience with previous “Secure Horizons”. They were paying us only about 18% for our services. It took us two years to realize their business practices. We then declined to accept this insurance and put them out of business and forced them out of El Paso.

Why Medical Bills Are Killing Us? This is the cover and main article on the latest TIME’s magazine. This report depicts in detail the billing and charge practices in the healthcare industry that are destroying our health care and again stresses the need for “price transparency”. It appears on the March 4, 2013 issue. If you do not receive TIME, you can read it at the following internet link: http://healthland.time.com/2013/02/20/bitter-pill-why-medical-bills-are-killing-us/print/

Texas Medical Board: The TMB had recently its day in Court 7 at the Federal Courthouse in Austin. Last year more than 7000 complaints...
New Year, New Mission, New Vision
(Continued)

plaints were filed against doctors in Texas. Most of them are usually dismissed but is a headache for anyone involved. Doctors are requesting due process and many changes were implemented on the last legislature thanks to your help. There have been abuses at the TMB that need to be rectified. Judge Lee Yakel will inform us of his decision in the next few weeks and will keep you updated.

Please give me your input about this format and remember we are here to advocate for medicine, you and your patients. We always welcome your participation, suggestions and criticisms. Could you also help us to recruit a member to EPCMS for this new year.

Thank you in advance for your help and devotion to your profession and your patients.

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2013 President Installation
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