



## President's Comment

**Luis H. Urrea II, M.D.**

*President*

*El Paso County Medical Society*



Dear Colleagues:

It has been an active and busy time for our Medical Society. I am very encouraged by the increased participation of our El Paso Medical County Society members. Thanks to all the physicians for walking the talk and taking responsibility in a more active role.

In May, our entire EPCMS delegation represented El Paso at TEXMED 2009 in Austin. The annual TMA conference and House of Delegates was as usual a remarkable experience. The TMA platform was finalized for our advocacy efforts in 2009-2010. It is always incredible for me to see the tremendous effort put forth by our statewide colleagues and TMA staff to improve the health of all Texans and the practice of medicine. I invite any interested physician to join us next year at TEXMED 2010 and learn how to become more active in YOUR future.

A highlight in Austin was the presentation of a TMA Minority Scholarship to El Paso native Nelly Estrada. She will be in the first medical class of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine starting this month. She wants to make an impact in our community and remain in town to practice.

The 81st Texas Legislative Session concluded June 1st. Due to TMA's efforts and a record number of physicians who lobbied during First Tuesdays at the Capitol and testified on our behalf in Austin, state lawmakers listened and passed several important measures that will improve patient care and access to healthcare in Texas.

Some of the healthcare victories include:

1. Protection of the patient-physician relationship, the cornerstone of our profession, from corporate interference.
2. Requiring insurers to use accurate data and valid standards when ranking physicians and networks.
3. Expanding the Texas physician loan repayment program to increase health care access in underserved areas.
4. Funding to study and implement programs to reduce obesity
5. Increased funding for graduate medical education.

There was a surprise at the end of the session regarding tort reform. A last second amendment was added by Senator Duncan,

from Lubbock, which would have expanded liability exposure from the original 2003 limits. However, TMA leadership quickly communicated how well tort reform has worked in Texas as well as the negative impact to our state if such a measure was passed. Governor Perry vetoed the bill. Thus, tort reform and the 2003 Proposition 12 victory for Texas were preserved. This attack on tort reform serves as a wake-up call and reminder to physicians. We must continue to be united and organized in a strong association, and be ready to protect the interests of our patients and profession.

I would like to thank several patient champions from El Paso who continue to volunteer their time and energy to represent and lobby on our behalf: Drs. Manny Acosta, David Palafox, Roxanne Tyroch, David Taber, Jose Luis Villarreal, Craig Cameron, Manny de la Rosa, Jose Aun, Andres Enriquez, Gilbert Handal, Luis Acosta and Elaine Barron. We need more champions and it starts with you.

Our efforts in Austin this session build a stronger foundation and understanding with our local state lawmakers. We look forward to moving forward on this momentum for the next session.

In late June, the 4th Annual TMA Border Health Conference in Washington D.C., co-sponsored by Congressman Silvestre Reyes and Dr. Manuel Acosta, Chairman of the Border Health Caucus, was a success and very pertinent to the health care debate. That evening, Dr. Rohack and Dr. Cardenas, both participants at the conference, were invited to the White House town hall meeting regarding health care reform. I thank Congressman Silvestre Reyes for his friendship, leadership and advocacy to improve health care on the Border.

We also took the opportunity on June 23rd to visit our Texas lawmakers and their staff to express our concerns and solutions on the proposals being debated. There is common agreement by both parties as to the need for reform. The disagreement is how to implement and pay for the change.

In our visits, we expressed the importance of why medical liability reform and Medicare physician payment reform must be included with the overall health care changes. Physicians must be protected from unexpected results if we follow evidence based medicine. Otherwise, the expected savings from efforts to eradicate inefficient spending will not occur. In addition, without a permanent solution, the current SGR formula will result in a 22% reduction in Medicare reimbursement on January 1, 2010. Physicians will be forced to close their doors, especially in poor underserved areas,

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because their practices will not be sustainable businesses. Our lawmakers must understand that any effort at meaningful health care reform must include tort reform and the permanent elimination of the flawed SGR formula.

Lastly, please save the following dates for two very important events. On August 1st, all physicians are being invited by the PLFSOM Founding Dean, Dr. De La Rosa, to participate in the inaugural White Coat celebration of the first medical class at The Plaza Theater. Come help celebrate the future of medicine in El Paso.

Then on September 1st, we will have the privilege of hosting the President of AMA, Dr. Rohack, to discuss the latest on health care reform. This is an unequalled opportunity to hear from our leader who sits at the table of reform representing every one of us.

The great debate on health care reform is well underway. President Obama has extended an invitation to physicians through the AMA to participate in the decision making forum. Our medical profession needs your membership and contribution. If you have not done so, please rejoin the County Medical Society, TMA, and AMA. I also ask each one of you to find a nonmember, whether in private or academic practice, and have them join our ranks. It is our duty to support our profession and improve health care for all citizens as well as to mold the future of medicine. The time and opportunity to make a difference is NOW.

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President, El Paso County Medical Society

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