

## From the President:

# Now What?

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President Barack Obama was re-elected. “ObamaCare” will be a force to reckon with, as it will not be repealed any time soon. It will unleash an army of bureaucrats that will seek to tell us physicians whom we can see, what we can do, and what we can charge.

It will balloon the Medicaid rolls, increasing the tax burden on our citizens without increasing access to care. It will stunt the economic growth of the states, cause the end of private insurance, and lead to a medical system that will no longer be the envy of the world.

But ObamaCare will only succeed if the physicians cooperate. Quiet, principled resistance must be our stand. So what should we do?

We in AAPS need to take the lead and remind the politicians that we are the highly educated, competent professionals who know medicine better than they do. We love what we do and want to practice our profession without the meddling, coercion, restrictions, and underpayments by top-heavy bureaucratic private insurance and government programs. We love our patients and want to see those who are sick get the best care possible. We want to feel positive about our profession once again, and we want new medical school graduates to expect a promising future as a reward for their hard work.

Physicians need to take every possible step to restore lost autonomy. Pulling out of insurance networks and refusing to put our electronic medical records online is a start. We need to have high-quality websites to let patients know we are available to care for them for a reasonable fee—cash, check, or credit card. The less third-party paperwork, the lower our fees can be.

We must refuse to join accountable care organizations (ACOs), in order to avoid inherent conflicts of interest. We must not allow ourselves to be forced to choose between what is in the best interest of our patients and what is the best way to fill the company coffers and please our employers. We must retain a single-minded devotion to our patients. ACOs will provide perverse incentives such that physicians earn more when they do less.

We need to replace the top-heavy, expensive Medicaid system with common-sense true charity, enlisting our communities to help their neighbors. Observing the devastation of Hurricane Sandy on the East Coast, it was families helping families and neighbors helping neighbors that provided the food and shelter to weather the aftermath. Government programs were slow and unresponsive to the urgent needs. As Nor’easter Athena arrived shortly thereafter, one sign posted on a Staten Island door said it all: “FEMA office closed due to bad weather.” We physicians continued to see patients, using our rationed gasoline to drive to the hospitals every day. Our own comfort was not our first priority.

I testified before the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Senate several years back. I told of the Zarephath Health Center, a free clinic established in 2003 to care for the poor and uninsured in central New Jersey. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) listened to my presentation of the AAPS plan for physicians to donate 4 hours a

week at non-government free clinics at no cost to the taxpayers. His answer was, “I think doctors ought to be paid.” Of course, we all know that the Medicaid system pays less than the cost of care, so we physicians do *not* get paid when we see patients in the Medicaid program.

But my suggestion went further. I proposed that physicians who give their considerable time and skills to care for the poor without compensation be protected by the state. Our work in the free clinics is already covered by the federal government under the Federal Tort Claims Act of 1996. Those who would sue us have to sue the federal government instead. So now we are simply proposing that New Jersey provide protection in our private practices for physicians who volunteer in charity clinics. Physicians who work in the medical schools are protected in this way, so why not protect physicians who care for the poor for no compensation at all?

Senate bill S-2231 has been introduced in the New Jersey Senate. Sponsored by Republican Sen. Robert Singer and Democratic Sen. Brian Stack, it is a common-sense solution that crosses party lines. It is simply the right thing to do. Our state legislators know that the expansion of Medicaid will have a devastating effect on our economy. The program already consumes \$10.7 billion in a state with a total budget of \$33 billion. We cannot afford to pay more for such an inefficient system, nor should we. The Volunteer Medical Professional Health Care Act will accomplish several important goals. It will:

- Increase access to care for those who find themselves sick and without funds;
- Relieve the taxpayers from the huge burden of funding a government program that pays bureaucrats instead of caregivers;
- Relieve physicians of the expense of medical malpractice insurance premiums and the mental anguish of the current litigation environment;
- Allow physicians to provide common-sense care without the estimated 30 percent excess tests for defensive purposes, thus lowering premiums for private health insurance;
- Enable us to revert to a time when communities helped those in need, helping in many ways, not just in medical care;
- Elevate the status of physicians, as they will be known as men and women who care about the poor, not as greedy rich people; and
- Provide the climate to revive private practice, where physicians work for their patients and not the government or insurance companies.

Let’s take our profession back. Let’s follow the Oath of Hippocrates, making our primary concern the patient in front of us. Let’s practice real charity and real transparency. It is just the right thing to do. It is what AAPS has stood for since 1943.

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