

Signs of Divergence Rather Than Coalescence!

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First of all, I hope that everyone had a joyous and wonderful holiday. Now that the year's end festivities are behind us, we must turn our eyes to the dawn of a new year. We must turn our attention to the future and its many problems, challenges, and opportunities. Before we take a closer look at what is awaiting us in this year, allow me to introduce myself to those of you whom I have not yet had the pleasure to meet.

A son of a physician, I grew up in New Delhi in India where I also completed medical school at King George Medical College. After a period of government service in India, I came to the United States for advanced medical training. I obtained a Master's degree in medicine at the University of Colorado. At the National Jewish Hospital in Denver I completed a fellowship in pulmonary medicine and a residency in allergy and immunology. Following a period as a research associate and clinical instructor in medicine, I moved to Phoenix in 1969 to join the allergy and immunology practice of Dr. Goodman, and three years later I opened my own practice. My family and I reside in Phoenix.

That was then and this is now. Let us consider what the year 2003 may have in store for us. Clearly, we live in interesting times. It is clear that the practice of medicine will continue to change, and it is blatantly obvious that these changes will have a significant impact on our lives.

We are facing a difficult war in a distant land whose culture and mores are alien to many of us. Our economy is less than exuberant, and the specter of terrorism from abroad and within is ever on our minds and affects to some of the freedoms we have cherished.

In addition to these global concerns, Medicare has, once again, reduced our fees. This time by 4.4%. The high costs of warfare and the diminishing tax revenues will have further impact on funds available for healthcare, especially for the un- and underinsured. Only a short distance down the road of time, on April 14th the regulations arising from the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) will require a significantly different approach to the management of patient information in our practices, to be sure at an increase in our practice expenses and overhead.

Surely, some of us will say, requiring a patient to sign a consent form giving a physician permission to use the medical information, just elicited from the patient, in the patient's treatment is yet another nail in the coffin of the ever-sacrosanct patient-doctor relationship. Others will claim that getting a patient's consent to mail a bill for services rendered to the patient's address of record is beyond reasonable. There may well be some truth in these claims, but until we are able to join forces in legal efforts to change oppressive or irrational but legal rules, we are required by law to obey them. Alas, we have not been able, over all these years, to speak with one voice, but still we have the opportunity to do so, and to do so in a constructive manner. All throughout this nation, medical societies' memberships are shrinking; old members are dying, and young physicians fail to see any reason for joining organizations from whom they gain no immediate benefits, and whom they consider archaic. These are signs of divergence rather than coalescence!

Finally, we should give recognition to the fact that we are indeed fortunate to be practicing medicine with relative freedom in an environment of constant scientific and technological advances, and in this still unrivaled land of ours.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to the outgoing president Dr. Mark Baldree, for the perspicacious, sincere and competent manner in which he guided the affairs of the Society during the past year, and for his significant expenditure of time and effort associated with the presidency of MCMS.

I look forward to working with you, the members of our Society, throughout this year.

Suresh C. Anand, M.D.
President