



DENVER MEDICAL BULLETIN

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STATE OF THE SOCIETY: 2006 Denver Medical Society Annual Report

If you have been paying attention, you know that the physicians of Denver and the Denver Medical Society have had a full and busy year advancing the interests of the medical community and its patients, another in the sequence of 136 committed years since the Denver Medical Society was founded. If you have been distracted over the past twelve months by the challenges of medical practice, this is our opportunity to bring you up to date about the important work being done on your behalf and to offer you the opportunity to become engaged in this work in whatever way meets your interest and your schedule.

It is no secret to anyone working in healthcare today that the number and complexity of issues impacting patient care, legal concerns, ethical questions, and every other aspect of healthcare are beyond the ability of any single individual or organization to track continuously. That is why the Denver Medical Society works with other local societies across the state, specialty societies, the Colorado Medical Society, and the AMA to support the interests of physicians in our local community. Our physician members benefit when all of the medical organizations they support work together to promote the interests of the medical profession and patients. An example of that sort of partnership was exhibited this year when the medical community united to urge the Colorado Insurance Commissioner to take a close look at the merger of United Healthcare and Pacificare. As a result of the pressure from the medical community, the Commissioner held a public hearing at which he heard

six hours of testimony from physicians and their practice managers from throughout Colorado expressing their concerns with the merger of these two large plans. Coordinated by the Colorado Medical Society, testimony at the hearing also included more than a half dozen specialty society representatives and a member of the AMA Board of Trustees. The medical community kept up the pressure and the result was that the Commissioner imposed a number of conditions on the merger, including the creation of the Colorado Physician Advisory Council to address problem areas between United and the provider community. DMS physicians, including DMS outgoing President Alan Synn, MD, continue to serve on the Council as the relationship with United evolves and provides insight for physicians' strategies in 2007.

Medicare Cuts Unite Denver Docs

This unity of purpose has been displayed in other arenas this year as well. Taking our lead from AMA negotiators in Washington, D.C., DMS joined with state and local medical societies across the country to contact directly, and urge members to contact, our members of Congress in order to reverse the Medicare fee cuts which initially were implemented on January 1, 2006. Having succeeded in having the cuts rolled back and replaced by a freeze at 2005 rates, physicians from across the country have spent the year working with Congress to avoid even more substantial cuts scheduled for January 2007 and to seek the complete revision

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of the methodology used for the Medicare payment formula. As early as March, DMS physicians joined their colleagues from across the state and across the country at the AMA Advocacy Forum for meetings on Capitol Hill to make Congress aware of the impact further cuts would have on access to high quality care for Medicare beneficiaries. Throughout the year, members have been urged to contact their Congressional representatives to express their personal concern and share insight into the effect the Medicare payment formula has on physicians and patients in local communities. Some DMS physicians even followed the example of Dr. Synn's practice by involving their patients in this process. By providing information to patients about the payment formula and offering patients the opportunity to complete postcards expressing their concern, which were then mailed by the practice to members of Congress, physicians added another voice to the discussion.

The DMS Board of Directors has communicated directly with our Congressional delegation in support of both a long term fix to the Medicare payment formula and other legislation which would provide some respite for Denver physicians such as a change in the Geographic Practice Cost Index (GPCI) to reflect the true cost of practicing medicine in an urban community. The battle over Medicare reimbursement rates continues at this point, but it is clear that physicians' concerns are being taken seriously by Congress and that this is a result of individual physicians and local medical societies forcefully communicating with their members of Congress to provide a real world context for issues being pressed by national AMA lobbyists.

Strengthening the Home Front

As important as they are, the Denver Medical Society and its members do not concern themselves only with national issues. Early in the year, the Denver medical community was shaken by the report of the arrest of a local physician as a result of a patient death. DMS leadership responded immediately to these events expressing concern about the impact on patient care

and access while urging a measured response until all of the facts of the case were known. While tracking the resolution of this specific case, DMS led efforts to arrange a meeting with the Denver District Attorney to discuss concerns surrounding the criminalization of errors in medical practice. An open and frank discussion was had with Denver District Attorney Mitch Morrissey and Assistant District Attorney Diane Balkin at which physicians expressed their concern about the effect these types of cases could have on the ability of high risk patients to obtain timely and appropriate medical care. Although participating physicians were satisfied that this case was unique and not an indication of a prosecutorial intent to pursue physicians with criminal charges as a result of poor patient outcomes, DMS intends to continue to monitor the environment in this area.

One of the most important roles of the Denver Medical Society is ensuring a viable practice environment for our members. DMS was involved in several activities during the year designed to advance members' practices. Early in the year DMS introduced a new member service which provides free prescription drug discount cards to physicians which can be distributed to their patients. These cards allow patients who do not have prescription drug coverage to receive substantial discounts at a wide network of pharmacies in the community when purchasing medications. Simplicity, for both the physician practice and patients, is the key to this program. In making these cards available to their patients, physicians are helping them afford their medication, but also increasing the likelihood that patient compliance with recommended medication regimens will improve. So far, over 6,000 cards have been distributed to DMS members, area clinics serving the un- and under-insured, and hospital emergency rooms, resulting in thousands of dollars in savings to Denver patients.

Collaborating with the Colorado Medical Group Management Association (CMGMA) and the CMS, the Denver Medical Society helped to sponsor the first physician salary survey specific to Colorado physicians. The survey, which was conducted by Krause & Com
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Denver Medical Bulletin: Alan Y. Synn, MD, DMS President and Publisher / David N. Campbell, MD, Chair of the Board / Johnny E. Johnson, Jr., MD, President Elect / Nora E. Morgenstern, MD, Treasurer / Kathy Lindquist-Kleissler, Executive Director / Barbara Kamerling, Program Director. The **Bulletin** is the official publication of the Denver Medical Society, established April 11, 1871, as the first medical society in the Rocky Mountain West. Published articles represent the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official policy of the Denver Medical Society. All correspondence concerning editorial content, news items, advertising and subscriptions should be sent to: The Editor, **Denver Medical Bulletin**, 1850 Williams Street, Denver, CO 80218. Phone (303) 377-1850. Fax (303) 331-9839. Web www.denvermedsociety.org. Email: dms@denvermedsociety.org. Postmaster: Send address changes to 1850 Williams Street.

It's a Bargain Only If Your Manager Joins!

Since 2001 the Denver Medical Society has sponsored an Office Managers Group for the purpose of helping these managers learn about changes in the work place which may effect the timely and effective management of a medical office. Often times, the sharing of problems and solutions comes from the wealth of knowledge and experience of the members who attend these meetings in addition to the outside experts who are invited to present a program. For a fee of \$50 per year, these managers meet during lunch time (12:00 – 1:30) to eat, greet and learn. There are usually 6 to 8 meetings per year.

The **Office Managers Group (OMG)** is guided by a small group of practice managers who help shape the concepts and programs for the year. Under their direction, an office managers chat room will be operational in a few weeks for members of the OMG. This will allow rapid sharing of information, and will also permit the posting of information from meetings. In the recent past, the OMG has sponsored meetings with:

- the staff from the Division of Health Care Financing, Colorado Medical Society

- an in-the-trenches manager who discussed how to evaluate employee benefits packages
- a session with nationally recognized coding expert Robin Linker
- and a class on assuring the medical office is protected against the routine and not so routine events covered by a myriad array of different insurances

The OMG even offered scholarships to attend an Employment Law Workshop presented by the Mountain States Employers Council.

But, we are seeing the same behaviors in office managers that we see in the physicians who hire them, an inability to tear oneself away from the office. The result is that new ideas and methodologies may not reach the people who need it the most, or who might be willing to explore other approaches to problem solving.

When the flyer asking for office managers to join the OMG comes out this month, we hope the physicians of the DMS will suggest, recommend, cajole their office managers to join.

The Denver Medical Society's 136th Annual Meeting

Friday, November 10
Cocktails—6:00 p.m.
Dinner—7:00 p.m.

Cherry Hills Country Club
4125 S. University Blvd.
Cherry Hills Village

\$45.00 per person

Call (303) 377-1850 for registration details.

Deadline is November 8.

Featuring

the Installation of

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50 year Physician Recognition of

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James L. Karel, MD
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William P. Nelson, MD
Manford M. Oliphant, MD
Albert R. Soberanski MD
Richard D. Talbott, MD



a Jazz Combo

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pany, PC, was an outgrowth of the medical practice staff salary survey that has been conducted over the past four years by CMGMA. Both the staff and physician salary surveys were completed in mid-summer and provide a valuable benchmark and resource for practices across the state. DMS members who participated in the survey received free copies and non-participating DMS members were able to purchase the survey results at a discounted price. DMS is also piloting a practice mini-audit program which, if successful, will offer practices a simple, low-cost method for obtaining a review of their practice operations by practice management experts. This project, which is still in the study stages, is being developed in response to recognition of the many challenges facing physicians and their practice managers in today's business climate. The results of the pilot study should be complete by the end of 2006.

DMS also continues its role as a resource for information important to the viability of members' practices. Programs offered to physicians and their practice managers included one presented in March by Dr. Marjie Grazi Harbrecht, MD, of the Colorado Clinical Guidelines Collaborative on the state-of-the-art in the development of pay-for-performance programs, one in June featuring Jane Brock, MD, MSPH, from CFMC discussing the benefits of practice redesign, and the CMS Practice-Based Office Technology Symposium in July. Providing these programs and other useful resources helps our member practices stay abreast of important issues and developments impacting the business of medical practice.

An exciting project under development for 2007 is DMS participation in a contract negotiated by the Colorado Medical Society with the Colorado Department of Public Health & the Environment to assist physicians in becoming personally and professionally prepared for a pandemic flu outbreak or other disaster. DMS has submitted a proposal to participate in this project. DMS will focus on evaluating the current state of readiness among healthcare organizations in our community and the extent to which physicians' involvement has been anticipated and communicated, as well as providing education and resources to physicians to prepare both their families and their practices for a potential disaster.

Physicians Embrace the Political Process

Not all public policy is drafted in Washington and DMS has been active in addressing local and state concerns. Denver physicians were prominent participants at Medicine's Day at the Capitol in March when physi-

icians from across the state spent the day learning about developments during the 2006 Colorado legislative session, the Colorado political landscape and how to interact with it, and meeting with their individual House and Senate representatives. During the legislative session, DMS and its members were active supporters of successful legislation to create a statewide smoking ban, a palliative care bill which will offer protection to physicians providing end-of-life care, and, of course, SB198 which attempted to create a level playing field in contract negotiations between physicians and health plans. Although the Governor ultimately vetoed SB198, substantial momentum for addressing physician concerns has been created in the legislative community, and DMS members continue to work with CMS legislative experts to craft a strategy for resolving these issues during the 2007 legislative session.

Leaving nothing to chance, DMS has been coordinating with CMS and the Colorado Medicine Political Action Committee (COMPAC) to increase physician participation in the legislative and political processes. A large number of DMS physicians completed a "Political Interest" survey that asked physicians to indicate their willingness to participate in various activities such as testifying before legislative committees, screening local legislative candidates, and actively supporting candidates for office. A few members indicated their own interest in running for a political office at some point! Collaborating with Exempla St. Joseph Hospital, the DMS also invited members and legislators to come together for an evening of casual conversation and chamber music in order to foster dialogue and develop relationships. All of this laid the foundation for physician interviews with primary candidates for contested Colorado House and Senate seats in Denver districts. Part of a statewide initiative coordinated by CMS and COMPAC, physicians were challenged to participate in the interview process in order to step up physician activism and influence in electing our political leaders. Participating physicians utilized a set of screening questions which had been developed through physician work groups to focus on medicines' priority legislative concerns. Through the interview process, local physicians were able to identify candidates who they thought would support medicine's legislative agenda and who they could recommend for COMPAC financial support. Due to the nature of Denver politics, only candidates for contested primary seats were interviewed.

Recognizing, despite the best efforts of physicians and their medical organizations to juggle the challenges impacting medicine, the fundamental need to restructure the way the healthcare system operates in Colorado, and acknowledging that leadership is unlikely to emerge at the national level, Denver physicians have been participating with their colleagues across the state

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SPANISH FOR THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

January 19, 20 & 21, 2007

EXEMPLA-ST. JOSEPH HOSPITAL 1835 FRANKLIN STREET, DENVER

The Denver Medical Society has invited Rios Associates to offer a three-day intensive, total-immersion learning experience in conversational and medical Spanish for physicians, nurses, PAs and other medical staff. Although challenging, the course is lively and rewarding. This is the eleventh time we have offered this highly popular class.

The cost of the class is \$395 for DMS members, \$460 for non-members. To register, complete the coupon below and include payment. All payments will be held until we have enrolled 15 people. If we are unable to enroll 15 participants, all checks will be returned and credit card information will be destroyed. No cancellations will be allowed after **January 2, 2007**. Call DMS at 303-377-1850 or email dms@denvermedsociety.org for additional information.

The University of Arizona College of Medicine designates this educational activity for a maximum of **24 hours in category 1 credit towards the AMA Physician's Recognition Award**. A processing fee of \$35, payable during class, applies for those seeking CMEs.

Enroll me in *Spanish for the Medical Profession* course offered January 19, 20 & 21, 2007.

Name: _____ Beginner class _____

Address: _____ Intermediate class _____

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Please make checks payable to the Denver Medical Society and mail with registrations to 1850 Williams Street, Denver 80218. You may fax credit card registrations to (303) 331-9839.

DMS members - \$395 **All others - \$460**

Payment enclosed _____ check _____ credit card _____

VISA _____ MasterCard _____ Card # _____ - _____ - _____ exp. ____/____

Cardholder Name and Address _____
(if different from registrant) _____

Signature _____

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in the Physician Congress for Healthcare Reform. Created after the 2005 CMS Annual Meeting, at which strong support was voiced for medicine's involvement in crafting a comprehensive strategy for health reform in Colorado, the Congress' mission is to craft a unified position for the physician community which can be used as the basis for participation in public policy development. Bruce Madison, MD, has been acting as the DMS representative to the Congress which has been co-chaired by former DMS President and now CMS President-Elect David Downs, MD. The group has met several times during the year to outline guiding principles that can serve as a framework for further discussion, educating themselves about various policy alternatives, and reaching out to the Colorado physician community for input and perspective. Denver physicians have been encouraged to respond to the draft guiding principles and to share their thoughts and concerns with Dr. Madison or directly with the Congress through its page on the CMS website at www.cms.org. The work of the Congress has taken on new urgency with the creation of the Blue Ribbon Commission for Health Care Reform through the passage of SB208 this year. With the creation of this Commission, on which Dr. Downs will serve as one of two physician members, it becomes particularly urgent that physicians be able to present a thoughtful position as state leaders craft a healthcare reform strategy for Colorado.

As the Denver Medical Society and its physician members embark on their 136th year of meeting the health and medical needs of the people of Denver, it doesn't get any easier. But by drawing upon our tradition of concern, service, and patient advocacy, together we will meet the challenges, overcome the obstacles, and serve the interests of our community as we have been doing since 1871.

DO WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS?



We use them for important member communications.

Please send yours to dms@denvermedsociety.org.

Volunteer Opportunities at Clinica Tepeyac

Serving primarily the Latino community of Denver, Clinica Tepeyac relies on volunteers to provide affordable, culturally sensitive healthcare to over 10,000 patients. The program provides basic medical services and preventive health education including screenings, physicals, immunizations and wellness exams. Founded in 1994 on West 40th Avenue by community members who turned a rundown house into a thriving health clinic serving the poor and uninsured, Clinica Tepeyac is now celebrating their 12th year of service to the community.

In Denver, as well as nationally, Latinos are more likely than other ethnic groups to be uninsured and have limited access to healthcare. According to the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, 36% do not have health insurance. The clinic has evening and weekend hours to accommodate families unable to take off time from work to seek healthcare services. Services are provided primarily by volunteer physicians and nurses and other healthcare professionals. Clinica Tepeyac also offers health education programs including:

- *Reach and Teach Community Education* – recruits and trains bilingual community members to serve as *Promotoras de Salud (health promoters)*. Promotoras are trained to provide practical information about disease prevention while imparting the idea that individuals can take control of their own health and the health of their family.
- *Milagros Program* – works with Latino youth to provide them with exposure to a wide range of health careers in the health care field, as well as information and support on how to pursue these careers.
- *Diabetes Management* – Monthly classes (in English and Spanish) to educate diabetic patients on how to effectively manage their diabetes.

Clinica Tepeyac is seeking volunteer primary healthcare providers to provide patient care services during clinic hours. An ability to speak Spanish is a plus but not a requirement for volunteering. Volunteer hours are available Monday through Thursday at various times of the day and evening. Find out more about Clinica Tepeyac, volunteer opportunities, or other ways to support their mission at www.ClinicaTepeyac.org or contact them at 303-583-0148.

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