

The President's Corner . . .

Cancer Programs At The Crossroads



There is still a lot that we do not know about the future of health care in America. We know that for the last five decades U.S. health care, our extensive research and development through the NIH, and our care for the elderly and poor have set some international standards. We know that our percentage of the gross national product devoted to health care has steadily increased, while health care inflation has steadily outpaced the rest of the economy. And we know that we have strived for a single standard of health care. We also know that these days are over.

It is somewhat painful to watch the denials of the changes and their implications. Even NIH officials tend to hope that holding a conference will make problems go away. One recent meeting suggested that cost containment was posing no problems for clinical research other than money for research fellowships. No one talked about the fact that HMOs and PPOs will dominate care and that they require participating physicians to agree they will not treat patients on clinical trials. No one mentioned that as HMOs and PPOs expand, they will not route patients to university medical centers for more expensive treatments. Apparently things are fine.

No one mentioned the Bernstein Report that suggests that 200,000 beds will close in the next four years, that six major chains may dominate all of health care, that 70% of patients will be controlled by HMOs and PPOs in the same time period. No one suggested that cancer care is moving back to a two-tiered system.

Now, we are all going through a tough time with these changes; however, if we are to be prepared, we need to let sink in the logic of the fact that incentives drive the system.

President Nixon's recent speech reminds us that the past fifteen years have been significant growth years for cancer care. We have built oncology units and pressed for multidisciplinary care, established programs, won the right to participate in clinical research as full partners, and much more. It is hard to believe that much of this is likely to be undone by the realities of the new medical economics.

Very likely we will not see quality cancer care programs disappear. Yet, we can expect some major restructuring, major reconfigurations, less new initiatives, more competition for low cost alternatives, and a great deal of confusion.

With the initiation of this new Journal, ACCC members, once again, pledge to keep our heads out of the sand, no matter how painful that might be. Hopefully, the editorial policies that Senior Editor Lee Mortenson discusses in his opening remarks will set the tone for its future content. If we are going to do our best to assure quality for our cancer patients, we need to discover what we do not know about health care dynamics and put it to work for us.

Cancer care programs are going to change. Research is going to be affected. The quality of care is going to be affected. The multidisciplinary aspects of care are going to be affected. It is happening now and how it all comes out is up to us.



Paul N. Anderson, M.D.
President

Alternative Delivery Systems, Berkowitz, Quality Control, and Contract Negotiations Highlight New Orleans "Oncology Economics" Conference

September 24-26

The Fairmont Hotel in New Orleans is the site for the third Oncology Economics meeting, September 24th-26th. Conference highlights include a focus on the problems and opportunities posed by new mechanisms for delivering cancer care including HMOs/PPOs, Freestanding Cancer Centers, home health agencies, regional cancer programs, new technologic innovations for chemotherapy administration, and some of the related quality control issues.

Professor Eric Berkowitz, head of the Department of Marketing at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, will give a special half-day tutorial on market segmentation, product differentiation, and life cycle of services. This session will help you understand the competition, how to market, and what kinds of strategies and actions you need to take.

Dennis S. O'Leary, M.D., former Dean of George Washington University Medical Center and the new President of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals, will address the quality control challenges generated by the rapid changes in the health care marketplace. Dr. O'Leary will deliver the second S. Barry Sakulsky Memorial Lecture. Last year's lecture was delivered by Dr. Robert S. McKenna, then President of the American Cancer Society.

Jerry P. Clousson, J.D., L.L.M., President of Physician Support Services and former director of the AMA's Department of Negotiations, will conduct a three-hour session on contract negotiations. This session will help you learn the fundamentals of the negotiating process between physicians, HMOs/PPOs, and hospitals.

"This meeting is intended to target a number of the new and pressing issues in cancer care," said Program Committee Chairman and ACCC Secretary David K. King, M.D. *"This Conference will bring to the attendees the most up-to-date information on the forces shaping cancer care today."* ■