



Governor's Message

I write this as the stalemate in the Senate continues over the means to block the 10.5% (ultimately 15.5%) cut in Medicare payments. The bad news is that the cuts are still in effect even though "everyone" assures us that ultimately they would be blocked. (The House has passed a bill by a veto-proof margin). The good news is that we are finally seeing the shift towards adequate payments for managing complicated, chronic health problems-those things that internists do. The payments for doing what we do and organizing care through a patient center medical home (PCMH) needs to be and appears to be evolving into a significant payment amount.

The evolution of internal medicine into a well-paid, intellectually and emotionally fully rewarding profession where we can best care for our patients and our communities has begun. This is not to diminish the many challenges ahead, witness the present Medicare bill stalemate. The bill includes the beginning of this process. We will need to demonstrate outcomes, not just activities. We will need to deal with the costs to practices for some sort of electronic data system. We need to deal with "zero balance" financing so that our gains are not done at the expense of others of our profession (though there will be much needed payment shifts). Forming a big circle and shooting in at each other is not going to get us very far. We need to look at different models that each of our practices-big, small, single, or multi-specialties can adapt to our own.

And the American College of Physicians will be there with us. The College is leading the way and adopting models in payment systems that really work. The College is leading the way on Capitol Hill to adopt these changes into legislation.

At our annual NMACP meeting from October 16-18 in Albuquerque we will hear up to the minute reports on the Washington political scene (just before the election) and an update on the progress towards the PCMH. The meeting will also include sessions on some of the latest advances in the art and science of medicine as well as a new Medical Jeopardy program where teams of residents will match their medical knowledge against each other. Luckily the rest of us can do it anonymously.

It should be a great meeting where we can help fulfill the College's core mission of Education, Collegially, and Advocacy. Looking forward to seeing you all there.

2008 Leadership Day at Capitol Hill

This year's Leadership Day on Capitol Hill coincided with the American College of Physicians Annual Session-Internal Medicine 2008. On May 13th and 14th we had warm and pleasant days in our Nations Capitol. For the first time ever, we had representation from all 50 States and the District of Columbia. Not only that, we had a record breaking registration of over 500 ACP members, almost doubling last year's record of over 200 volunteer physicians which was a record in itself.

The New Mexico delegation for this annual session included **Michael Kaufman** (Taos) Governor, New Mexico Chapter, **Barbara McGuire** (Albuquerque), **Dick Honsinger** (Las Alamos), **Justina Trott** (Santa Fe), **Abinash Achrekar** (Corrales), **Eileen Barrett** (Shiprock) and **Waseem Khawaja** (Las Cruces).

In the era of changing health care, more emphasis on safe and high quality healthcare and declining reimbursements for Internists, Internal Medicine is facing several challenges. The events which were organized by ACP-Division of Governmental Affairs and Public Policy in its Washington Office were held at the Washington Convention Center and had the following three priority issues for 110th Congress:

- Physician Payment Updates under Medicare should be positive and predictable. Medicare payments to physicians were

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scheduled to be cut by 10.4% on June 30th, 2008 and by another 5% on July 1, 2009.

- Enhanced Care Coordination, through the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH), ACP recommended that Congress provide \$500 million in dedicated funding to the PCMH Demonstration Project. The purpose of this recommendation is to allow a patient to have a permanent relationship with a primary care physician trained to provide first contact, continuous and quality care.
 - Preserve Access to Primary Care Services. Studies have shown that primary care improves outcomes and lowers costs.
- Other priority issues that we discussed included the following:
- Guarantee Access to Affordable Health Insurance Coverage by co-sponsoring H.R. 2351, the Healthcare Act. This Act provides the State's an option to convert Medicaid and SCHIP to a Needs-Based Program with dedicated federal funding. This would be an important step to ensure that all Americans have health insurance via public and private approaches.
 - Support Reauthorization of Higher Education Act of 1965 to restore Critical Economic Hardship Deferment Pathway known as 20/200 rule.
 - Improve Funding for Health Care Research and Quality in 2009. This funding would allow the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to carry out its mandate to improve health care quality and to reduce cost by identifying which treatments work best and their costs for comparison. The funding would also assist increased research in programs which address critical shortages in primary care, misdistribution of health care services and lack of workforce diversity.
 - Provide Positive Incentives for Reporting Through an Enhanced PQRI program so that a greater bonus is paid for physician services for patient-centered care.
 - Finally, ACP supports and advocates its members to persuade their Legislators to cosponsor H.R. 1952, The National Health Information Incentive Act of 2007. This act would provide financial incentives for primary care physicians in private and solo-practice settings to acquire and use Health Information Technology. More information regarding these bills can be obtained from the ACP website, www.acpservices.org.

Following registration on May 13th, delegates received an introduction to advocacy and presentation training. We learned about tips for effective advocacy, how to have a successful meeting with our Representative and how to do a follow up with members of Congress. It was exciting that we, as physicians, should be involved and invite our members of Congress to our State chapter meetings and local medical society meetings. The College recommends its members sign up as key contacts so that their congressional officer can hear from its constituents directly. We learned about the legislative process during our advocacy workshop with **Stephanie Vance** of Advocacy Associates.

Following that, there was a workshop on Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR), Healthcare Quality and Access to Care, where the staff from Senate Finance Committee, House Ways and Means Committee, House Energy and Commerce Committee and CMS staff provided updates and answered questions. It was quite clear to learn that Medicare has changed its role from a passive payer for healthcare services to an active purchaser of quality medical services which explains the emergence of pay for performance (P4P) programs and physician quality reporting initiative (PQRI). Next, **Bob Doherty**, ACP SVP of Governmental Affairs & Public Policy provided details on ACP priority issues and the current political environment in Washington, DC considering it is election year and limited time that the 110th Congress has to make decisions on several pending bills.

Our New Mexico delegates attended the Welcome to Washington Reception hosted by ACP Services where we found plenty of opportunity to network, exchange ideas and formulate a strategy on how to communicate with the Legislators the issues which our internists and patients are facing.

On May 14th we had another great and exciting day in Washington DC. We arrived at the Washington Convention Center to have brief consultations with the ACP staff on issues, followed by briefings by members of Congress. It was our opportunity to hear how our Legislators were working towards making things better in healthcare by introducing, sponsoring and co-sponsoring bills. Soon after that, we all headed towards Capitol Hill. Buses were ready to take us to our appointments which were prearranged, thanks to our chapter liaison.

Our New Mexico state delegation had already coordinated as to who would be the principal spokesperson for each of the issues. We were aware of ACP's position on the issues and how these issues affect patients in New Mexico. We had leave-behind documents with us on each issue for the congressional officers. We were prepared to represent our physicians, patients and the state.

Our first two appointments were simultaneously at 10 am at the Longworth House Office Building with **Representatives Tom Udall and Heather Wilson** in the Cannon House Office Building. Our delegation had to split up. **Dr. McGuire, Dr. Achrekar** and I met with **Representative Heather Wilson** and with **Joe Moser**, her legislative assistant regarding our healthcare concerns, while **Dr. Kaufman, Dr. Trott and Dr. Barrett** met with **Representative Tom Udall**. Next, we all got together, shared our ideas and met with **Representative Steve Pearce** and his legislative assistant at 11 AM.

We had a nice break in between for the next two appointments with our Senators. We utilized this opportunity to have lunch, visit neighboring places and go to the Botanical Gardens. At 3 PM, our delegates met with **Senator Jeff Bingaman** in his large conference room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building. As usual, the Senator came to greet us and we had pictures taken. We were delighted to see his health policy fellow, **Dan Derksen MD**, and his health legislative assistant, **Frederick Isasi**, who happened to be a previous classmate of **Dr. Barrett** at the School of Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They knew each other. We were all pleasantly surprised.

Next, we went down just a few floors and met with **Senator Pete Domenici** and his legislative assistant, **Michelle**. We

Photo Gallery



Senator Pete Domenici meets with New Mexico Delegation. Pictured are Waseem Khawaja, MD, FACP, Eileen Barrett, MD, Michael Kaufman, MD, FACP, Senator Domenici, Richard Honsinger, MD, MACP, Abinash Achrekar, MD, and Barbara McGuire, MD, FACP.



Senator Jeff Bingaman meets with New Mexico Delegation. Pictured are Waseem Khawaja, MD, FACP, Abinash Ackrekar, MD, Richard Honsinger, MD, MACP, Senator Bingaman, Barbara McGuire, MD, Justina Trott, MD, FACP, Eileen Barrett, MD, and Michael Kaufman, MD, FACP.

had quite productive meetings with all of the House Representatives and Senators, and their health policy fellows/legislative assistants. We had ample opportunity to bring to their attention our concerns regarding patient care, challenges for physicians who like to enter into primary care and changes that we would like them to make to revive the specialty. Each of us had powerful stories that we shared with our lawmakers. We advocated, persuaded and encouraged them to support the bills which help not only fix faulty SGR, but also to support a patient-centered medical home, debt relief for physicians, HIT funding for solo practitioners and small practices and lobbied for the alignment of incentives to encourage more physicians choosing primary care as a specialty of preference. We offered them an opportunity to come to our chapter meetings and contact us as a key contact for any questions. Later on we followed up our meetings with Legislators via e-mails. We believe that, together, we have shown enough strength and have made significant contributions that will bring change for the better.

After our meetings, we shared our thoughts, provided feedback to ACP Services and met for the closing ceremony which was a white coat event in front of Capitol Hill. We not only had the opportunity to show our strength, our unity, and our motivation to be the agents of change for the better we also enjoyed inspiring speeches and wonderful closing remarks by **Dr. David Bronson**, Chair, ACP Board of Governors, **Dr. John Tooker**, Chief Executive Officer of ACP and **Dr. Joel Levine**, Chair, Board of Regents. Please join us next year for our next leadership day in May 2009.

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**New Mexico Chapter Scientific Meeting
October 16-18, 2008
Embassy Suites Hotel
Albuquerque, NM**

**Register online now!
www.acponline.org/chapters/nm**