



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS
INTERNAL MEDICINE | Doctors for Adults

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PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER

UPDATE FROM PCIM

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Editor's Note: This mailing is a periodic communication with the members of PCIM. Your comments and suggestions are welcome and should be sent to pcim.hq@verizon.net

Annual Meeting Addresses Tough Issues and Practical Topics

Pennsylvania internists and residents enjoyed a variety of topics and events at the Annual Meeting held in Harrisburg October 24-26. Many thanks to Program Chair Noel Ballentine, MD of Penn State College of Medicine, Hershey Medical Center.

The Program Committee provided an interactive learning experience for this year's participants. Strategy Solutions, Inc. of Erie, PA, provided each audience member with a keypad to respond to speakers' questions. Armed with almost instant feedback, speakers could correct misunderstandings or congratulate our fast learners and continue the presentation.

A session on Mastering the Art of Coding offered participants solutions to common coding pitfalls. Attendees agreed they received immediate "take home value," and would make profitable changes when back in the office. Other highlights included Rediscovering Insulin for the Treatment of Diabetes, Dermatology for the Primary Care Physician, Office Diagnosis of Common Knee and Shoulder Orthopaedic Problems, and Nontraditional Cardiac Risk Factors.

Participants also benefited from stimulating presentations on the medical, legal and ethical aspects of advanced pain management, and medical futility.

**A CAPITAL VIEW -
GRASS ROOTS EFFORTS PAY OFF
MCARE ABATEMENT PASSES**

The promise of Mcare fund abatements was finally answered on December 23 when Governor Rendell signed HB 44 into law. The abatements will be funded by 25 cents per pack in new taxes on cigarette sales.

By now, you should be well aware of this short term relief package, which came after months of intense grass roots pressure and lobbying. PCIM was deeply involved in the politics of this effort, both in the Capitol and via its members' letters, emails and phone calls.

As a result of the legislation, most internists will receive a 50% abatement on Mcare payments. Rural internists who serve as OB/Gyns will receive a 100% abatement. While PCIM sought 100% abatement for all physicians, the funding problem made this a political impossibility. However, we were successful in blocking any means testing or requirements that you must accept Medicare and Medicaid patients to qualify.

The bill allows physicians who already paid the 2003 surcharge that was due December 31, 2003 to receive a refund. The key to these abatements, however, is that you must sign an agreement to remain in practice in the Commonwealth for a full calendar year. If you have a renewal date of January 1, 2004, you must remain in practice in PA through 2004 to receive the abatement. If your renewal date is May 1, 2004, you must agree to remain in practice from May 2004 through April 2005. Mcare will have an on-line application form for qualifying for the abatements by January 2, 2004. The request for abatement must be submitted using this electronic form no later than February 15. (More inside)

A CAPITAL VIEW - *continued*

The legislative lobbying and your efforts did pay off in forestalling "solutions" that could have been disastrous for internists. We were successful in beating back a third attempt to collapse the JUA rating system, which would have produced even more cost-shifting onto the backs of internists. Dr. Ralph Schmeltz, the PCIM President, was at the hearing to testify on behalf of PCIM members as part of a primary care coalition. This alliance of primary care physicians has been very successful this year in making your voices heard - and when combined, the PCIM, PA Academy of Family Physicians and the PA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics boast a combined membership of 13,000 physicians.

CAPS VOTE COMING IN THE SENATE?

In the end, we were also successful in getting a promise from the Senate leadership to schedule a public hearing and a committee meeting in early 2004 to get a vote on a bill that will permit a Constitutional amendment for caps for non-economic damages. It's likely that the Senate will include an exception for catastrophic cases, which will force another vote on caps in the House of Representatives. The House passed HB 1326 in June after a major grass roots and lobbying effort, but the Senate has not yet taken up this legislation. Even if passed in 2004, the House and Senate will have to again pass the same resolution in 2005 and voters would have to pass a statewide referendum before caps legislation could be passed into law.

OTHER MED-MAL ISSUES UNRESOLVED

Beyond the continuing possibility of a rate collapsing scheme, other potential legislative solutions that are still on the table include a reduction in the amount of mandated professional liability coverage to \$500,000 and experience rating for premiums. We have also been assured that the Supreme Court will consider establishing a sliding scale for contingency fees for attorneys. But the Court may also rule that the Fair Share Act, which eliminates joint and several liability in many cases, is unconstitutional due to the process by which it was passed, not due to the provisions themselves. And if so, that legislation will again have to pass the House and Senate. Internists need to keep up the pressure on their own Senators, House members and legislative leadership to underscore the need for these actions by the General Assembly.

TIME TO SAY THANK YOU, AND MORE

Beyond the immediate situation with the need for tort reform, physicians are in a continuing series of legislative and regulatory battles with trial lawyers, insurance companies, other health care providers, and sometimes the government. Your involvement can help PCIM address these issues and problems as they arise. As a result, it is critically important that each of you re-contact the legislators you have been emailing, faxing and calling to say THANK YOU for passing the abatement program. This is an opportunity to re-emphasize that their action does help in the short term, but that without real action to address the long term problems, the med-mal crisis will worsen for ALL physicians, not just the high risk specialties. As more doctors leave the state and young doctors refuse to practice here, this crisis threatens access to quality care for all Pennsylvanians. The easiest way to be heard is to get on the web, and use PCIM's Voter Voice software and website, where we already have a draft thank you note posted. Last year PCIM members sent 4,300 emails to state and national legislators, Governor Rendell and President Bush. Way to go!!!

It's been an incredibly frustrating, but largely successful year for PCIM on the hill. Next year promises to be no different. Your grass roots involvement can be a key to successes in the future. Keep up the pressure, now, and establish your relationships with elected officials so that they listen when those other issues arise.

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ASSOCIATES' ABSTRACTS PROGRAM

PCIM received 115 entries in this year's Residents' Abstracts Competition, chaired by **Stasia Miaskiewicz, MD**, and **Geetika Sood, MD**. Of these, 73 were selected for presentation as posters to be judged at the Annual Meeting. Twelve winners were selected: from Albert Einstein Medical Center: **Kathryn Chan, MD**; **Kamran Darabi, MD**; **Richard Sacks, MD**; and **Jacobo Vazquez, MD**; from University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, McKeesport: **Shahid Babar, MD**, and **Anwaar Randhawa, MD**; from Easton Hospital: **Shantan Reddy, MD**, and **Saima Shafi, MD**; from Geisinger Medical Center, **Shanmugam Santhi, MD**; from York Hospital: **Vijaya Tummala, MD**; from Reading Hospital: **Mandeep Dhawan, MD**; and from Abington Memorial Hospital: **Yasser Moussa Aleech, MD**.

GOVERNOR'S LETTER

Although the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania College of Internal Medicine was extremely successful from an educational perspective and got outstanding evaluations from those that attended, the problem is the continued poor attendance of the membership. It was the conclusion of the PCIM Council that because of the size of the State of Pennsylvania, we would be better served to have meetings focused in the three Chapters in the State. It is hoped that by doing it this way we will be able to get more people to participate and also to reduce the cost associated with a statewide meeting.

I would like to solicit from the membership any suggestions for meetings within the Eastern Region. Suggestions already submitted have included a CME type presentation and an ACP update followed by a sit down dinner. A second suggestion has been to have one of the ABIM Self-Evaluation Process (SEP) modules presented for those individuals who are up for recertification or for CME credits for those who are not. The national ACP is going to have one of these modules in Philadelphia in September but we might consider having a different module in the spring time at a location that would be convenient for many of the members. We are also planning, within the chapter, to have a resident day where they will have their abstract presentations and the regional jeopardy competition will occur.

The three governors for Pennsylvania have decided that they want to experiment with different types of regional meetings to see what works and draws the interest and attendance of members of the organization. We want these meetings to be of value to the membership. Please feel free to send me any ideas you have about this matter and anyone who is interested in working on these projects in their local area should contact me directly.

Between now and early February is the time to develop resolutions to be presented at the Board of Governors meeting in April. Resolutions are recommendations for action or policy positions by the College and if approved by the Board of Governors, are sent to the Board of Regents. This is the method the American College of Physicians uses to set its priorities for the future. If anyone is interested in submitting a proposed resolution to the Governors office, I can forward the information on how this is to be done.

Over the past few years the College has changed the pathways to fellowship and it is my sense that many members have not recognized that multiple pathways are available. As such, I had sent out a letter to all members of the College within the region asking them to consider applying for fellowship. I am pleased to report that at the present time about 25 members have requested applications. At the same time I sent a letter out to board certified internists in the region who are not members of the College asking them to consider membership. If you have partners or colleagues who are not members of the College, I urge you to encourage them to join. This organization is the voice of Internal Medicine, and in these very difficult times, we need as many of our colleagues as possible to join us.

May the new year bring you good health and good cheer.

John P. Fitzgibbons, MD
Governor, Eastern Pennsylvania

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DID YOU KNOW:

Three of the abstracts submitted to the Annual Meeting competition were selected for oral presentation to the Annual Meeting general session.

- **Laveena Chhatwani, MD**, from St Luke's Hospital, presented "Myocardial Ischemia Secondary to Anomalous Coronary Circulation."

- **Ali Yazdanyar, DO**, from Reading Hospital, presented "Increased Case-Fatality of Strokes in Patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis."

- **Debra Zimmerman, DO**, also from Reading Hospital, presented "Antibiotic Resistance of Group B Streptococcus and Intrapartum Management." Much hard work led to stimulating presentations.

Congratulations to all Residents!

Welcome to Our New Council Members

PCIM is pleased to announce the new Council Members: **Benjamin Lloyd, MD**, Reading Hospital; **Kofi Clarke, MD**, Western PA Hospital; **George Gleeson, MD**, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center; **Louis Leff, MD**, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center; **Anthony Maniglia, MD**, Altoona Hospital.

Medical Jeopardy Tournament

The team from Geisinger Medical Center in Danville won this year's Medical Jeopardy Tournament, one of the most popular events at the PCIM Annual Meeting. Congratulations to team members **Chandra Pemmasani, MBBS**, **Sanjay Sarin, MD**, and **Hamid Mukhtar, MBBS**. The Geisinger team will go on to compete in the nationals at the ACP 2004 Annual Session in New Orleans.

If you are not receiving important news and announcements from PCIM by email, perhaps we do not have your current email address. Please send it to the state office: pcim.hq@verizon.net. Thanks!

PCIM Award Recipients

This year's Annual Meeting concluded with the presentation of eight awards. Laureate Awards were presented to **Jack Ende, MD**, University of Pennsylvania-Presbyterian Medical Center; **Daniel B. Kimball, Jr., MD**, Reading Hospital and Medical Center; **Barbara E. Barnes, MD**, University of Pittsburgh Health Systems; and **Louis E. Leff, MD**, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Clinical Practice Awards were presented to **Bennett Lorber, MD**, Temple University School of Medicine; and **William L. Bressler, MD**, JC Blair Memorial Hospital, Huntingdon; The Pressman Award was presented to **Ralph Schmeltz, MD**, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. The first Herbert S. Waxman Voluntary Faculty Teaching Award was presented to **Wilbur W. Oaks, MD**, of Hahnemann Medical College, Philadelphia.

The Waxman Award was established in memory of **Herbert S. Waxman, MD**, who served as Senior Vice President for Medical Knowledge and Education for the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine. He was actively involved with the Pennsylvania Society of Internal Medicine and the ACP for many years.