

## Leaders Who Listen



Since LACMA represents one of the largest counties in our nation, political leaders ask us for our opinions. On a recent Friday night, Congressmen Pete Sessions from Texas, and Bill Cassidy, MD, and John Fleming, MD, from Louisiana traveled to L.A. to discuss health care reform on the national stage with LACMA. The discussion covered a wide array of subjects from the high cost of medical care, to coverage of the uninsured, to the defensive practice of medicine, to how the health care dollar is doled out, and the fundamentals of the doctor-patient relationship. All sides of our L.A. County doctors were represented from those seeing only indigent Medi-Cal patients, those in academia,

to those in private practice or concierge medicine. We are diverse but our members are well informed, passionate, and hard working.

With costs of medical care in our country soaring, arguments were made that cutting doctor's fees incentivizes us to see more patients, driving up volume, and ultimately increasing overall spending as ancillary tests and other spending also increase. The concierge doctors made powerful arguments that centralizing and personalizing care leads to better doctor-patient relationships, fewer tests, fewer hospitalizations, fewer referrals, and thus less expense. If this model is to move forward and meet demand, where will these new concierge doctors come from—current medical students, PAs, foreign trained doctors or from specialty doctors returning to primary care as they would now have the financial security to do so?

The Republican alternative to Obamacare would focus more on market driven forces. They state that in a system where doctors are paid on volume, where defensive medicine encourages excessive testing, and where patients are not held accountable for expenses, it is not surprising to have costs spiraling upward. To change this, by allowing Medicare balanced billing, patients will have more ownership for their care, and healthier discussions over which medicines or tests are needed. Medicare would pay a fixed amount, doctors could charge what they need to, and patients can decide if they choose to pay more by meeting the difference.

This was a great discussion and I felt the decision makers were coming to us for input. These doctors in Congress know our situation, can relate to us, and can forge solutions that work for the country, patients, and physicians. It is empowering to be part of the discussion. Thanks need to go to former LACMA President Dr. Marcy Zwelling for making this evening possible.

Will the Affordable Care Act be implemented in 2014? Will it be found illegal by the Supreme Court? Will it be repealed? I don't know the answers to these questions. But at least on this night I had the sense that good solutions are out there and those in power are listening to us, the doctors in the trenches.

Things are contentious in the capital and at times I get really frustrated with the great divide. Sometimes it seems that leaders don't step up and do the right thing, such as with an SGR fix, as they are mostly concerned with protecting their seat. At this point, facing a crisis in how medical care is delivered in our country, we have an opportunity to right the ship. It's been allowed to veer off course for too long and it is time to regain control. We know what is right about medicine: a doctor and a patient; research; new developments based on hard science. Things to be considered include costs, benefits, risks, and affordability. But health care should not be the venue for outside business interests such as insurance companies or pharmaceuticals to take advantage of the field. Let's use this time as an opportunity to set things right.

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