



Three Practical Reasons

Real-life reasons for supporting organized medicine

BY TROY ELANDER, MD

IN MY PRESIDENT'S letter this month, I would like to address the practical reasons why one should join the Los Angeles County Medical Association. I am often asked, "Why should I join organized medicine? I would do so, but it's just too expensive." Is it too expensive? We can talk for a long time about why one should join—because it's the right thing to do for our profession, for advocacy, because of the support available to our practices. But what if doctors are not motivated by these reasons? Let's get practical. I feel joining LACMA saves us money, much more than the cost of dues, while also directly helping our patients.

Okay, let's look at the dollars and cents. When it comes to cost, doctors have to be aware of the Medical Injury Compensation Reform Act and the challenge to it, which occurs *every* year. We cannot be complacent and just assume that because MICRA has been in place since 1975 that it will always be there. In fact, MICRA is under attack every year by personal injury lawyers looking for the right climate in the legislature.

Due to MICRA, California has some of the lowest malpractice premiums in

the United States. In my specialty, ophthalmology, the average premium in Los Angeles is \$23,000 whereas in states without MICRA premiums range from \$31,000 to \$47,000. This saves me at least \$7,000 per year. The average premium for all specialties in Los Angeles is \$30,000 compared to ranges from \$68,000 to \$130,000 where there is no MICRA coverage. These are *real* savings.

We cannot assume these savings, due to MICRA, will always be present. The California Medical Association staff works tirelessly to preserve MICRA, supporting candidates who are pro MICRA and constantly monitoring for when the trial lawyers may strike. So, by keeping MICRA in place, my \$1,150 saves me at least \$7,000 per year. For other specialties the amount of savings is considerably more.

How does MICRA help our patients? By keeping health care costs down, access to doctors, hospitals, and clinics is increased. In addition, injured patients receive their rewards three times faster than in states without MICRA reforms—and the patients are the ones who receive most of the settlement money—not the attorneys.

Another LACMA benefit that helps

my bottom line is jury duty assistance. As we all know, serving jury duty is our civic responsibility and all of us are expected to comply. However, planning for this can be incredibly disruptive especially when patients are scheduled months in advance. LACMA helps in this regard by allowing members to reschedule their jury duty time and location for when it works best in their schedule. In addition, physicians are offered a one-time call-in any day of the week. If your services are not needed when you call, you are done and have met your obligation. This can save days out of the office, which can many times over make up for LACMA/CMA dues. Our patients also benefit since our schedule is less disrupted on short notice, causing rescheduled appointments, and it keeps us there, in the office, for them.

A final practical benefit I would like to mention is our newest, DocBook MD. DocBook is a free application for smart phones that allows LACMA physicians to send instant messages and high resolution images, access a directory of LACMA colleagues, perform a quick pharmacy search, and use multiple devices such as an iPhone, iPad, or iPod Touch seamlessly.

This innovative product was designed by physicians for physicians, provides an exclusive HIPAA compliant professional network, and is offered exclusively to medical society members. This service will quickly improve communication between doctors, lessening the tendency to duplicate tests, and will provide "on the go" information. Sign up takes all of three minutes.

DocBook MD is free, it is easy, it allows us to communicate better, and it is only available to LACMA members.

And so, these three reasons I have given you: MICRA protection, jury duty assistance, and DocBook MD, are cost saving reasons why it makes sense to join LACMA and the CMA today. These reasons are not theoretical, they are not philosophical—they are practical. Please do me a favor and tell your non-member friends why they cannot only afford to join but why they and their patients will even profit from joining.

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