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FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

NASS Themes for 2003: Patient Safety and Advocacy

Each year, NASS evaluates the challenges facing the organization and our members, and identifies issues to receive priority attention in the coming months. The primary themes for my presidential year 2002-2003 will be **patient safety** and **advocacy**. Substantial changes are underway in both these health care arenas. It is essential that NASS be proactive to maintain the ability of our members to provide quality patient care.

In the patient safety arena, there will be new requirements for hospital accreditation by the Joint Commission for Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO). Beginning in January 2003, hospitals will be required to have a site of surgery identification system in place to qualify for certain quality points in JCAHO reviews. NASS' Sign, Mark and X-ray (SMaX) program fulfills the JCAHO requirements.

Perhaps even more important are the legislative developments involving patient safety. It seems clear that some form of reporting system for "medical errors" will come into existence. It is **essential** that appropriate confidentiality regulations be enacted as part of this legislation. This will require considerable advocacy efforts on behalf of our members as

the plaintiff's bar have the ear of key members of Congress.

The other major focus of advocacy will be the Medicare payment system. As most of our members are aware, reimbursement is expected to be cut 4.4% for 2003. The final figure for 2004 has recently been calculated and is projected to be an **additional reduction** of 4.5%. Under the present flawed reimbursement formula, the medical profession has been aware that the 2003 and 2004 payment reductions may, in fact, be minor compared to the "steep cliff" calculation for 2005. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) now has an estimate for 2005. CMS forecasts a **further cut** of about 20%. Access to care for a Medicare patient is already threatened at present reimbursement levels. It is evident that the flawed reimbursement formula must be changed and correction made for the present cuts.

I encourage NASS members to join the NASS Board of Directors in patient safety and advocacy efforts. Use the Sign, Mark and X-ray program in your hospital and surgery center. Please contribute to Spine PAC and help with grass roots advocacy in your local congressional area. We must face these challenges head on and with vigor.