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FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

NASS Advocacy

Partnerships

A New Era in Approaching Legislative and Regulatory Issues

In recent years the intrusion of legislative and regulatory requirements on the practice of medicine has become almost overwhelming. It is estimated that one of the most recent legislative “unfunded mandates” – The Health Insurance Portability and Privacy Act (HIPPA) will cost individual practices tens of thousands of dollars a year to become compliant. All this while physicians are reeling from the effects of a reduction in present Medicare fees of 5.4% and contemplating a further 4.4% reduction for the coming year. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Congress and the Administration have all acknowledged that the Medicare payment formula is flawed. However, no branch of government has seen fit to correct the problem.

The Bush Administration has recently declared that it will continue the “Budget Neutral” approach to Health Care Financing that was a hallmark of the Clinton years. This is clearly an untenable position in the face of our increasing over-65 population and the demand of patients for: (a) easy access, (b) high quality care and (c) the latest technology.

In his NASS presidential year, Dr. Neil Kahanovitz was the driving force to move NASS proactively into the advocacy arena. This was a necessary effort to protect the interests of our patients and NASS members. Neil was visionary in his recognition that the legislature and governmental agencies could not be relied upon for “fair treatment.” It has become increasingly clear that the influence of advocacy and lobbying on our practices is substantial. Physician and patient groups have not positioned themselves as well as HMOs and trial attorneys, for example. While Dr. Kahanovitz’ leadership positioned NASS a step

ahead of many professional medical societies, still greater efforts will be necessary to help us “stay in the game.”

In evaluating the effectiveness of various advocacy strategies, NASS has decided to emphasize two new initiatives to heighten our effectiveness on advocacy issues. First, NASS has joined with 12 other subspecialty medical societies in The Alliance of Medical Specialties. This group represents more than 160,000 medical specialists. On urgent and cross-specialty issues such as Medicare financing and tort reform, we can now approach legislators and regulatory agencies with a unified message from a membership comparable in numbers to the AMA (approximately 260,000 members). There is strength in numbers! The broader the consensus on an issue, the more comfortable legislators feel taking a position and that it will serve the wants and needs of their home constituents.

The second initiative that NASS will emphasize is expansion of the financial base of the NASS (c)6 and SpinePAC. An additional \$50 of an individual member’s NASS dues will be earmarked for advocacy efforts. Further, NASS has initiated discussions with industry to partner in providing additional financial backing for advocacy. A number of advocacy goals are common to NASS members, patients, and industry. Examples of these issues include patient access to improved technology, overall financing of the health care system and spinal research.

I am pleased to report that Medtronic Sofamor Danek is the first of our 50 NASS (c)6 industry partners to join NASS members in “taking up the colors” and agreeing to a substantial financial contribution to support

our common advocacy strategies. NASS secretary, Dr. Bob Watkins, Eric Muehlbauer (NASS Executive Director), Pamela Krueger (NASS Director of Advocacy) and I recently met with Mr. Michael De Mane (President of Medtronic Sofamor Danek) and some of his top company executives to cement previous preliminary discussions on a higher financial commitment. Other Medtronic Sofamor Danek executives having input into this decision were John Ross (Vice President of Provider Services), David Miller (President of Medtronic Spinal Systems), Hank Pellegrin (Director of Global Physician Education) and Rob Peterson (Director of Reimbursement). NASS

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plans to continue similar meetings with other industry members of NASS (c)6.

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ment formula. Involvement in the Alliance of Medical Specialist Coalition and the increase in the financial resources available for advocacy efforts will, we hope, lead to future successes on the legislative and regulatory fronts.