

President's address

The Sine Qua Non of Quality Medical Care

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New Orleans

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I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

Thus ended *Invictus*, a poem about an unconquerable soul, by William Ernest Henley. Is this true of medicine today? What about you as a practicing physician? Let me share my philosophical reflections about certain forces on the horizon that, in my opinion, could affect your independent judgment. I will not detail the accomplishments and the issues of this past year. That can all be found in the *President's Report* in the 1985 LSMS Annual Meeting Delegates Handbook.

Proposed changes in the practice of medicine abound. *An alphabet labyrinth of acronyms invades us*. PPOs, HMOs, IPAs, MESHs, DRGS, are examples. All claim a more efficient practice of medicine yet deny that quality will be sacrificed. The proponents of these changes urge immediate embrace otherwise you will not be able to compete and your practice will fail. *These evangelists speak in terms of market share, advertising budgets, and contracts full of legalese such as "hold harmless agreements" and "cut off" dates after which you will not be able to join*. How does one evaluate and deal with all of this? Let me suggest an approach that goes back to basics.

1. The first inquiry, the *sine qua non* of the doctor-patient relationship in quality medicine, is simply stated: *Is this in the patient's best interest?* The patient's welfare must be paramount.

2. Understand that the essence of the acronyms — PPOs, etc. — is *contract* medicine. An essential part of the contract is payment by third parties to you for services rendered. The responsibility for evaluation of the charge and the responsibility for payment is removed from the patient. Also *cost containment*, a prominent feature of these contracts, is a concept that may be bureaucratic in conception and flawed in execution. In fact, *this may be*

the Achilles heel of the currently proposed forms of contract medicine because of the potential chameleon-like change into rationing of necessary medical care. Only a patient has the right to ration his or her individual medical care.

3. Be prepared to evaluate and fully understand all of the elements of the contract. My previous communications with you suggested questions to ask. Recently the California Medical Association published a booklet with 101 questions to ask. It is worthwhile reading. *The anti-trust, medical negligence and Federal Trade Commission considerations of contract medicine are important* and these will be discussed at the other lectures during this meeting.

4. Be wary of promoters who urge you to sign up without delay. A good rule to observe is: *Track the route of all dollars received by the enterprise and see who benefits monetarily for your services rendered*. Is there truly any cost savings or merely a redistribution of the funds or worse, a more costly and cumbersome system?

5. Never fail to use the concept of "Lateral Thinking" proposed by deBono in his book *New Think*. Define the problem, challenge assumptions and consider alternative solutions. As physicians, we are trained to use the scientific method and thus have the background to do a proper investigation.

6. Anticipate that a battle of philosophical principles is imminent. If you grant an erroneous premise, all the meetings and attention to detail will not make the conclusion correct. *When one concludes that enslavement is wrong it serves no worthwhile purpose to go to meetings that will decide who will be the guards*. Challenge assumptions! *Remember that those who lust to control your destiny draw their power from your sanction*.

7. Have the courage to come to a conclusion and act on your convictions. *Do not let intimidation or fear or panic control your destiny. Let reason reign. Remember that one person in the right tips the scales of justice more than the majority in the wrong. In the quest for right, go for truth and not for the votes or market shares*. Let Galileo be your hero and not the Opportunists in the Vestibule of Hell vividly portrayed in *Dante's Inferno*. Imagine in

This speech was delivered to the Louisiana State Medical Society House of Delegates on March 8, 1985 by outgoing president Donald J. Palmisano, MD, JD.

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