

# Los Angeles

## President's Letter

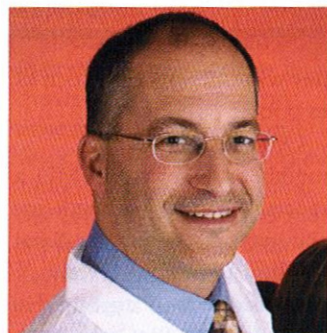
### A Call for Patient Personal Responsibility

**T**he expectations placed on physicians seem to increase daily. We are expected to provide outstanding patient care—with little or no room for error. We are expected to be compassionate and understanding of the needs of our patients, their families and their caregivers. We are expected to know the limitations of the various health plans in which they are enrolled, as well as the vagaries of the formularies they are subject to by virtue of their health plan enrollment. We are expected to communicate our findings to patients and their families, as well as to their other physicians and allied healthcare providers.

These expectations struck me when I completed an online course in documentation that my professional liability carrier offers in return for an 8 percent discount on my premium. The cogent lesson was that physicians must document every element of their interactions with patients in order to protect themselves from allegations ranging from medical negligence and personal misconduct to failure to return a phone call.

In fact, the course suggested a physician should always carry a portable dictation device so that every out-of-the-office conversation with a patient or family member can be immediately

for inclusion in the medical record. In my 22 years in practice, I have never done this, but I can certainly understand the recommenda-



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tion and see value in initiating such a practice.

However, I became concerned when the course dis-

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cussed issues around patient noncompliance with a physician's recommendations. In particular, if I see a patient and advise him to return for follow-up in two weeks or four months, and the patient fails to keep the appointment, the course stated that my staff or I must contact the patient. We must communicate that he missed the appointment

and that there are personal health consequences because of it. We must document our communication and any conversations that follow.

I thought to myself, where does the patient's personal responsibility end and physician babysitting begin? Certainly, physicians are not reimbursed for these extraordinary efforts to contact patients in order to confirm care that patients were previously advised was necessary. When do patients and families take responsibility and when do we stop blaming physicians for everything that goes awry in healthcare?

I am sure my sense of frustration is palpable. Medicine is first and foremost about the doctor-patient relationship. Legal considerations aside, we are not our patients' caretakers. Patients must appropriately participate in their own health. At some point, patients should be responsible for their compliance with our recommendations and their adherence to our advice. If my glaucoma patients skip their appointments, they should be responsible for the results—not me. If a hypertensive patient fails to have her blood pressure monitored, it is not her internist's fault.

I am tired of physicians always taking the blame. It's time for a return to personal responsibility in healthcare.

## September Seminar Focuses On the Essentials Of Being a Lawful Employer

**A**ct fast to participate in "The California Labor Laws You Must Know," a seminar for physicians and staff that will teach the ins and outs of employing others lawfully.

Sponsored by the Los Angeles County Medical Association and the California Employers Association, the event will take place from 6:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 25, at LACMA headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. The event in the AON Building Auditorium includes dinner and costs \$25 for both LACMA members and nonmembers.

CEA's Stacy Rochelle will lead the seminar. She is a specialist in human resources with 15 years of experience in dealing with wage and hour law, employee relations, labor negotiations, and training. Rochelle's presentation will cover important facets of employment, including hiring and firing, payment issues and record keeping. Featured topics are: how to avoid hiring problem employees; interviewing dos and don'ts; alternative workweeks; deductions from pay; reporting time pay; and employee handbooks.

Seating for "The California Labor Laws You Must Know" is limited and registration was open when this magazine went to press. To register, call LACMA Economic Advocacy Director Socorro Perrins at 213/226-0338 or e-mail socorrop@lacmanet.org.