

## The President

### HANGING TOGETHER

THIS is my last President's Page. Dr. Carl Adkins of Fayetteville will be installed as your President at our Annual Meeting this month. While this has been a fantastic year and has meant more, personally and professionally, than I can express, I nonetheless confess to some small sense of relief that I will be passing the gavel, especially to such a capable person. During the past year, I discussed in these pages issues that I felt were important to call to your attention, such as improving communication, involvement in the political process, cost containment, malpractice tort reform, efforts in caring for the medically needy and the role of our organization. While I am sure that there have been some disagreements, I have been encouraged by the many positive comments I have heard.

For my last message, I would like to address an issue that is, in my view, a potential cause for concern. I am concerned about the possibility of increasing fragmentation of our profession into smaller, limited-interest specialty groups. These groups sometimes seem to have a very narrow sphere of interest, and may not be as willing to take a broader view of what is best for our patients and for Medicine in general.

As a urologist, I am well aware of the importance of the point of view of the specialist or subspecialist, but the broader view may be required in these times. Numerous outside pressures, such as governmental economic constraints, third-party payor intervention and the continuing malpractice crisis climate, are threatening the foundations of our free-enterprise, individual doctor-patient relationship, the basis for the best medical care in the world. We must not forget that we are all doctors first, and specialists second. This is not a reflection of a "circle the wagons" mentality or in response to a perceived threat by any group. It is a realistic appraisal of problems potentially facing us. At a time when severe economic constraints are being imposed on health care by outside forces, we in Medicine—united—must continue to stand firm for what we believe in: quality—the best possible care for the patient at the lowest possible cost. If we fragment

ourselves into smaller groups with conflicting interests, then we may lose some of the influence we can yield as a united group for the ultimate benefit of our patients.

There is nothing wrong with differences of opinion and candid, blunt discussion. This is very crucial and needed, but if such discussion reaches the point of dissension and discord, and sets group against group or specialist against generalist, this serves neither the best interests of our patients nor of Medicine. There are legitimate differences of opinion and outlook among groups of specialists, and even groups of physicians within those specialties. The place to bring these different viewpoints together is through the framework of our State Medical Association and of the AMA. There, honest differences of opinion can be aired, conflicting ideas resolved and a consensus reached. There is no doubt that united we will have more influence for the benefit of our patients than many smaller groups can achieve.

These are trying times for the profession of Medicine, and many changes are in sight. This is no time for "business as usual" or limited self-interest. We need innovative and imaginative ways to deal with these changes and to preserve the quality of care we have worked so hard to achieve. In the words of Ben Franklin from our historical past, "Gentlemen, we must all hang together, or most assuredly, we shall all hang separately."

I look forward to seeing you all at our Annual Meeting to air your views and opinions; to make your comments; to share your ideas, and finally, to participate in reaching a consensus which will become the policy for the West Virginia State Medical Association. See you at the Greenbrier!



HARRY SHANNON, M. D., President  
West Virginia State Medical Association