

*President's address*

# The Sine Qua Non of Quality Medical Care

**DONALD J. PALMISANO, MD, JD**  
New Orleans

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## President's address

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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

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your mind's eye Galileo brought before the authorities. They ask him to recant. He looks them in the eye and says, "Though it may be heresy, the fact remains that the earth revolves around the sun." Cherish independence. Read for inspiration the life of Thomas Paine, author of *Common Sense*, and an intellectual father of the American struggle for independence. He too lived in ". . . times that tried men's souls." Search out the Brian Hooker translation of Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Relax and delight in Cyrano's bravery and wit. Listen for a moment as Cyrano answers his friend Le Bret.

**Cyrano**

Then I exaggerate!

Very well,

**Le Bret**

(Triumphantly)

Oh, you do!

**Cyrano**

Yes;

On principle. There are things in this world  
A man does well to carry to extremes.

**Le Bret**

Stop trying to be Three Musketeers in one!  
Fortune and glory—

**Cyrano**

What would you have me do?

Seek for the patronage of some great man . . .  
Make my knees callous, and cultivate a supple spine, —  
Wear out my belly grovelling in the dust?  
No thank you! Scratch the back of any swine  
That roots up gold for me? Tickle the horns  
Of Mammon with my left hand, while my right  
Too proud to know his partner's business,  
Takes in the fee? No thank you! . . .  
Calculate, scheme, be afraid,  
Love more to make a visit than a poem,  
Seek introductions, favors, influences? —  
No thank you! No, I thank you! And again  
I thank you! — But, . . .

To sing, to laugh, to dream,  
To walk in my own way and be alone,  
Free, with an eye to see things as they are,  
A voice that means manhood — to cock my hat

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Where I choose — At a word, A *Yes*, a *No*,  
To fight — or write. To travel any road  
Under the sun, under the stars, nor doubt  
If fame or fortune lie beyond the bourne —  
Never to make a line I have not heard  
In my own heart; yet, with all modesty  
To say: "My soul, be satisfied with flowers,  
With fruit, with weeds even; but gather them  
In the one garden you may call your own."  
So, when I win some triumph, by some chance,  
Render no share to Caesar — in a word,  
I am too proud to be a parasite,  
And if my nature wants the germ that grows  
Towering to heaven like the mountain pine,  
Or like the oak, sheltering multitudes, —  
I stand, not high it may be — but alone!

In contrast to the above brave souls, our actions should not be in the model of the social metaphysicians — those who derive their self-esteem from what others think of them. Remember our heritage. *America is a land of immigrants — born not of privilege but of opportunity. This is a land of giants — not in physical stature but in freedom of the soul. The soul of this nation is a heroic commitment to freedom, liberty and individual responsibility. Inherent in the definition of liberty is the absence of coercion.* If you meet critics who state these values are storybook patriotism not consistent with the realities of the present world, have them tell that to the widows and children of Americans who died on battlefields around the world defending these ideals. Also tell it to those who now stand ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for this nation. To challenge schemes that threaten quality medical care and encourage rationing not in the patient's best interest should not be a difficult decision to make. The only time it creates anxiety is when the physician fears economic loss for failure to cooperate with what the promoters claim is the wave of the future. Is this a rational fear? Even if the non-joiner went bankrupt, is this a greater burden than the loss of life suffered by those who died for principles? One does not go to a debtor's prison for bankruptcy. One can start anew and learn how to compete more efficiently the second time around and still not compromise principle. The likelihood of disaster because of failure to join present schemes is remote in my opinion. Also, a currently popular soothsayer, John Naisbitt, concludes that we are now in an information society and human resources are the competitive edge. Quality will be paramount. I believe in Competition, the Free Enterprise System and Freedom of Contract. These are hallmarks of America. However, as physicians, we must balance competition and efficiency with our fiduciary responsibility to our patients. *Compete as a professional and not as a hustler. The competent professional attracts*

patients with skills of healing, not with thinly disguised kickbacks or coercion. The touchstone of success is more likely to be found in competence, compassion, communication and consent than in a contract.

8. Issues such as the above discussion demand involvement in the democratic policy decisions of this medical society. Encourage people to run for office. Question candidates in detail. This forces the candidates to crystallize views and set goals. All benefit. Do not let them answer in general terms; ie, I am for good. Ask them what their version of good is. Ask them if they are prepared to spend the time bringing the policy decisions of this House of Delegates to the public, the state legislature, the Congress and the press. Ask them why they desire this job or any other office in this society. *In a battle for survival you don't want leaders who got the job merely to put another honor on their curriculum vitae or who only sought to use this as a stepping stone to office elsewhere.* Such individuals frequently fail to take an unpopular stand for principle for fear it will jeopardize their aspirations to higher office. Remember also that to run for office and lose is no mark of dishonor. It is the American way to have elections and although there can be only one candidate with the majority vote, all win by having the system function. I fondly remember accepting

a nomination for third vice-president in 1975 which was politically unpopular. My opponent won the election but my ideas were expressed to the membership of the House. After all, who among us has never seemingly suffered defeat only to have those very principles championed and accepted at a later time.

In closing, I would remind you of the beautiful poem by Kipling entitled "If." It contains many "If" passages; ie,

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

Then he speaks of risk and my modification follows:

If you can risk it all standing up for truth  
And the patient's best interest  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And — which is more — you will be a Doctor  
in the true sense of the word, my son

And lastly, to modify Henley's *Invictus*:

My goal is to be the master of my fate:  
My goal is to be the captain of my soul.

You have been patient while I exercised by *First Amendment* rights. Thank you for allowing me to serve you this year as President. As my physician friends in Hawaii say: *Aloha, Mahalo!*

2007 contact information for Dr. Palmisano is:

Donald J. Palmisano, MD, JD  
Intrepid Resources® / The Medical Risk Manager Company  
5000 West Esplanade Ave., #432  
Metairie, LA 70006  
(504) 455-4895  
DJP@intrepidresources.com  
[www.intrepidresources.com](http://www.intrepidresources.com)