

## President's Report 2009

It is with sadness that I stand here this morning to present this report on behalf of your president, Stephanie Lash. Our thoughts and prayers are with her and her family now at this time of their loss. For those who wish to join Stephanie and the boys in a remembrance of John there will be a funeral service on Monday afternoon at 2 PM at the all Soul's Congregational Church at the intersection of State Street and Broadway in Bangor, with a reception to follow after that in the church hall. Dr. Lash prepared these comments to deliver today, and it is an honor for me to share them with you for her, in her voice.

The major emphasis of my work this past year has been a focus on the health impacts of lifestyle choices, particularly as they affect the epidemic of obesity. Right now the average American is 23 pounds overweight. This is costly both personally and for our country. Between 1998 and 2006 the rate of obesity in the US increased by 37%. Calculations show that, on the average, medical spending on obese individuals is 1,429 dollars greater per year than on those of healthy weight. This means that the increase in obesity seen in the US in the past ten years is costing us an additional 40 billion dollars a year! Physicians are critical in the fighting of this battle. Here in Maine I am proud to say that your MMA is working hard with other groups to begin to reverse this trend.

- In the State Legislature we have helped to pass three bills that will require documentation of BMI in our student population, ensure increased physical activity in Maine's public schools, and require that restaurant chains in Maine post caloric information at the point of purchase so that we can make smart food choices.
- Your MMA is working to promote dialog between the regional Healthy Maine Partnerships and local physicians.
- We are providing information for individual physicians who are willing to take the time to connect with their local schools to get the word out about healthy weight initiatives and the 5-2-1-0 message and other programs to help children and adults lose weight.

We hope that with these efforts we can start to reverse this epidemic. I encourage all physicians to continue to be involved in this work. If you would like to learn

more, I encourage you to check your MMA website for other useful tips and teaching tools.

This year we have begun working with the state and a group of other individuals representing various experiences on the health impacts of global climate change. In stepping back and looking at the big picture there are many who argue that this is THE issue of our times and that it will have truly profound impacts on our health, economy, and social structure. While it is very difficult to forecast all of these events with great precision, there is no doubt that this is an issue which will grow in significance. It seems critically important to begin to understand what we may face and how we may best respond to prepare.

The third area of our involvement this year, related to the news updates you hear every day, is health care reform. President Obama has set health reform as a cornerstone of his agenda. The increasing costs combined with the decreasing coverage for health care in the United States bring a profound imperative to try to bring real change to our somewhat patchwork system of coverage. There is no doubt that there are very strong forces opposing change. And the fear of change, particularly in something as personal and critical as health care, is difficult enough without the powerful efforts of some of those who may stand to see their present business climate change for the worse. Yet the majority of physicians here in Maine and the AMA itself have now come out in support of the need for substantial reform.

- Critical to us in this reform is the repeal of the of the SGR formula and that any future budget formulations which affect physician payment are NOT linked to costs, such as drugs and laboratory services, over which physicians do not have control.
- Clearly reimbursement for evaluation and management services has not kept pace with increasing costs. The loss of primary care physicians and those providing primary care for chronic conditions will be reversed only when reimbursement for their time and work is addressed. We need to continue the fight for adequate payment for primary care physicians.
- Any change in the system MUST respect physician/patient autonomy.
- Here in Maine support for recruitment and retention of physicians is particularly important.

- We need improvement in funding for both psychiatric care and wellness/preventive care.
- We need simplification of the paperwork burden at all levels. This would help doctors reduce their costs and free time for better use talking with and caring for our patients.

While the final version of what will be considered by Congress is not yet clear, I plead with you to contact our Senators and Representatives, let them know that you are listening and that you care about these and other aspects of health reform. Get involved! If you only do this once every ten years this is The month and THE year!

Thank you for allowing me to serve you as your president. I have been deeply honored by your selection of me for this role. And it is with both confidence and pride that I am able to pass this mantle of leadership on to Dr. David McDermott.