

Perspective: Physician Advocacy

Why physicians need to play a more active role in national health care decision making.

BY CARLO A. DALL'OLMO, MD



As I reflect on all aspects of my career, I wish I had known on day 1 how vital advocacy at all levels of practice—for one's patients, practice, and specialty—is to the success of our practice of medicine. Remarkably, after all these years, I see a greater need for physician advocacy today than at any time in our history.

I entered private practice when medicine was practiced in a much simpler manner, with few administrators and simpler rules. The physician's input was respected, and often a handshake was all that was needed to seal an agreement.

Over time, this relationship changed as insurance companies and large institutions expanded their administrative base, often in response to the government's expanding administrative state, leading to an ever-growing bureaucracy. In the process, the physician's status and influence became marginalized. Today, one need look no further than Obamacare, an expansive bureaucracy that places health care rights and regulation-forming powers into the hands of political administrators. Created with minimal physician input, it is for physicians to "right" this bureaucratic behemoth as it unfolds.

Indeed, the need for advocacy today has never been greater. Unfortunately, advocacy as a "course" is not taught in the medical school or postgraduate curriculum, but it should be and needs to be. How else will young physicians become aware of the forces they and their practice will encounter? Continuing to neglect this is a great disservice to physicians, medicine, and patients.

I would advise young physicians to make every effort to become aware of the forces affecting medicine by joining the appropriate societies that advocate for their specialty; it is only in this manner that they will have a voice in their future. We cannot pretend that others will do it for us. In fact, abdicating that responsibility will only allow other voices to be heard, with possible unfavorable consequences. Engage as

many of your colleagues as possible to do the same, as there is power in numbers.

Although we physicians will not win every battle, our advocacy will affect decision making. Speaking out remains the best long-term approach for our patients, our profession, and our practices. There are no benefits in our shirking this responsibility. ■

Carlo A. Dall'Olmo, MD, is with the Michigan Vascular Center in Flint, Michigan. He has disclosed that he has no financial interests related to this article. Dr. Dall'Olmo may be reached at carlodall@aol.com; www.michiganvascular-center.com.