



Bulletin

of the Mahoning County Medical Society

November-December 2002

How I Spent My Summer Vacation

Robert J. Marx, D.O.

The last time I wrote anything with this title, I think I wrote about camping and fishing in the Ozarks. This year, however, Uncle Sam and the U.S. Army Reserve Medical Corps gave me a totally different summer vacation, although it did include camping.

I received a call mid-May from my reserve unit in St. Louis notifying me that I should report for active duty on May 31. After five weeks of hurry-up-and-wait, I reported to Bagram Air Force Base near Kabul, Afghanistan. It was about 110 degrees with 60 m.p.h. winds and enough blowing dust to turn you a lovely shade of desert brown. I was attached to a Forward Surgical Team from Connecticut. An FST is similar to a MASH but much more mobile and generally closer to the fighting than a MASH unit.

After a week, our group was flown via helicopter to a firebase in the mountains in the southeastern part of the country. Our mission

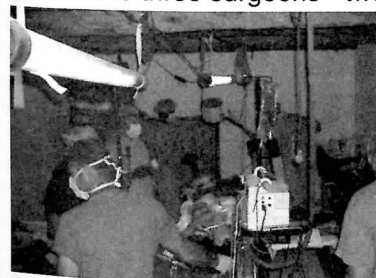
was to provide medical support to Special Forces and other groups who were hunting al Quaida and their munitions caches. Fortunately, we were able to stay in the same location for the



947th Forward Surgical Team
Dr. Marx is on far right

remaining tour of duty. We lived in tents and took cold "Navy showers" – get wet, soap up, turn the water back on, and rinse off the solidified soap. Our laundry facilities consisted of two buckets – one with soapy water and the other with clean water – along with a plunger for agitating and a clothesline. We ate a lot of rice, beans, and flatbread.

There were three surgeons - two general surgeons and one orthopedic surgeon.



Performing hernia surgery in the OR

We operated on more than sixty patients performing combinations of general, orthopedic, vascular, cardiothoracic, urologic, and neuro-surgical procedures in an operating suite with

three operating tables. Our operating suite was a goat barn, roughly 10' x 20', with only three fluorescent lights and six 100 watt light bulbs for the entire OR. Each instrument set consisted of nineteen instruments.

In addition to caring for coalition force soldiers, we operated on injured captured al Quaida so they would be in good enough shape to undergo questioning. We also operated on local villagers ranging in age from less than one year to very old men who had no idea how old they were. Most of the patients had thoraco-abdominal injuries and frequently had sustained complex multiple extremity injuries. Even in these extremely primitive conditions, there were no wound infections and the only mortality was one suicide bomber who sustained massive cardiac injuries.

In our free time, we helped build three schools for both boys and girls. No women in the last ten years had been able to attend school openly, and it is questionable how much education was available to the village girls prior to Taliban control when all formal education ceased except for teaching of the Koran to the young men. We also helped rebuild the local hospital, which had had no surgical procedures performed or overnight patients in the 40 years the facility has existed. We spent much time helping with deep well construction and helping design and build the province's first septic tank systems, one at each school.



Building the school



Distributing school supplies

We spent several evenings in the OR while small arms fire from AK-47s was directed towards our camp or in the bunker while 107mm rockets flew overhead. Fortunately those firing on our position were very poor shots and no one was hit.

My summer in the mountains is an experience I'll never forget. I'm glad we were able to save so many lives and help improve the quality of so many others, and I'm very glad to be back in Youngstown caring for our people here.

Bulletin

Editor Denise L. Bobovnyik, MD

Managing Editor Karyn Frederick

Editorial Board

Eugene Potesta, MD Daniel Handel, MD Ronald Yarab, MD

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Phone (330) 758-1624 Fax (330) 758-1805.

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CALENDAR

December 3, 2002 *Nominating Committee meets*

January 28, 2003 *Annual Meeting,
Holiday Inn, Boardman*

March 17, 2003 *Distribution of new
Membership Directory*

March 28, 2003 *International Dinner,
Tippecanoe Country Club*

May 27, 2003 *Society Dinner, Holiday Inn,
Boardman*

September 23, 2003 *Society Dinner, Holiday Inn,
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From the President

by Eugene L. Potesta, Jr., MD

A Year in Review

A little less than a year ago I had the honor of addressing the Mahoning County Medical Society for the first time as the new President. We announced that we would continue to publish the

Bulletin and it would be our primary means of communicating with our membership and with potential new members. I would like to thank Dr. Denise Bobovnyik and Karyn Frederick for their excellent work on the new format of the *Bulletin*. I feel that it has been very effective in bringing our message to our members.

In the first issue of the new *Bulletin* I posed several questions regarding membership in the county and state associations, among which was "What do the Mahoning County Medical Society and the Ohio State Medical Association do for me?". In answering that question, areas of service and member benefits were addressed, along with our desire to increase these services in quality as well as quantity.

This year, we were able to introduce a new service to MCMS members with the signing of the OSHA Partnership Agreement which allows for voluntary OSHA review and certification and exemption from the OSHA programmed inspection list. Many of our members have availed themselves of this service and to date we are proud to say that the overwhelming majority feel that this has been of value to them.

In addition, our members have had access through the OSMA to Cardinal/Allegiance services, a group purchasing system which affords members considerable savings on medical and office supplies; *athenahealth*, a medical billing service; the Workers' Compensation Group Rating Plan; and health insurance benefits through the OSMA Insurance Agency. These programs continue to be available to our members exclusively. We also have emphasized being a referral resource to our physician members and we continue to serve in that capacity.

Membership preservation and growth are crucial. High percentages of membership in your medical societies sends a message to the political world that we are organized and willing to speak in a unified fashion. We continue to make efforts to expand our membership. We have and will continue to reach out to young physicians and physicians in training. We appear to be off to a good start; the Mahoning County Medical Society was recognized by the OSMA this year for having the highest percentage of membership retention – 94.95%.

An area that is near and dear to my heart personally is political participation in matters that are of relevance to the medical community. To paraphrase Theodore Roosevelt, "Walk softly, carry a big stick, tap it on the ground when necessary and periodically let it fly". We as physicians can no longer afford to remain on the sidelines while our political opponents actively engage in the political process. This year you, the members of the Mahoning County Medical Society and the Ohio State Medical Association, have flexed your muscles, put your shoulder to the wheel and contributed financially to your own well-being. Your efforts were instrumental in the election of Justice Evelyn Stratton and Lt. Governor and Justice-elect

Maureen O'Connor to the Ohio Supreme Court. This was no small undertaking and did require the support of everyone. The medical societies and their members have proudly answered this call, as evidenced by the turnout of over 2,000 physicians, patients and staff at the Rally in Columbus on October 30th. You are all to be commended and your hard work will be rewarded. SB 281, also known as Ohio tort reform legislation, has been passed by the Ohio Senate and is now in the House. We believe we will finally have a Supreme Court which will give this legislation the fair hearing that it deserves and has been denied in the past. We do anticipate that this legislation will stand judicial review. This will make Ohio the 23rd state in the nation to have tort reform legislation in place. This is long overdue.

As important as the outcome of your efforts are to your immediate relief, I believe that a larger lesson has been learned. The lesson is that we as physicians have tremendous ability to seek and get the support of our friends, family, patients and communities. As a group, physicians are consistently ranked as the most trusted professionals in America. This is as it should be since we are, in my opinion, the most noble of professions. We should continue to utilize our good reputation and name to further causes that are worthy, including our efforts to secure care for the patients in Ohio.

Applause, applause to you all and thank you for answering the bell.

We continue to seek the confidence and support of other physicians who have as yet not joined the Medical Society. Hopefully our collective successes will inspire all physicians in Mahoning County to seek to join us.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Karyn Frederick, our Executive Director, the Mahoning County Medical Society Council and members at large for making this last year a productive one for me and the Society.

Dr. Marc Saunders will be assuming the position of President of the MCMS in January, and I have the utmost confidence that he will expand upon our efforts and continue to earn your trust.

Thank you for electing me to serve you in the 2002 year; it was truly an honor to be of service to you.

FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

Denise L. Bobovnyik, MD



The physicians of Ohio have a lot to celebrate! Our candidates for the Supreme Court of the State of Ohio successfully won their terms due in large part to the support, financially and politically, by the Ohio physicians.

This is the first large-scale success that I have seen involving physicians who came together united in one philosophy. Who said you can't herd cats!

Perhaps this is the beginning or continuation of a grassroots movement involving all physicians in a common cause. Now is not the time to sit back and be satisfied with our accomplishments. There are several additional issues to be settled.

Presently, physicians are facing a 4.4% cut in 2003 Medicare reimbursement as a part of a total 15%, three-year cut. This comes on top of a 5.4% decrease for the 2002 year that is already in effect. This is in addition to a nearly 40% increase in cost of running a practice.

Now, I don't know about you, but coming from our area of the state, I know what other professions would do when faced with a nearly 20% pay cut over four years. There are rumblings that, although nearly 97% of physicians presently participate in the Medicare program, some are limiting acceptance of new Medicare patients, and some are considering opting out altogether. A recent AMA survey shows 60% of physicians have or are considering limiting acceptance of Medicare. An AAFP survey similarly states 22% of family physicians are unable to take new Medicare patients. To add insult to injury, some Medicare HMOs are increasing the office co-pay from \$5.00 to \$25.00 per office visit. This means a higher out-of-pocket price for the patients. I had one patient insinuate that this increase of \$20.00 was actually going into my pocket. I pointed out that the total payment to me was the same but Medicare is paying less so he must pay more. Seems like we get it from all sides.

Sounds ludicrous? You bet!

Apparently, Medicare expenditures are linked to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When GDP declines, so does Medicare reimbursement. Due to errors by Medicare officials (CMS formerly known as HCFA) in predicting 1998 and 1999 Medicare targets, we are faced with the present proposed reimbursement reductions.

So correct the mistake you say. Not so easy. CMS claims it is not allowed to go back and adjust estimates with the actual numbers. Herein lies the debate. It is up to Congress and the Bush Administration to nudge this change along. The House passed legislation (H.R. 4954) to delay payment cuts for 2003 until a long-term settlement can be devised. The Senate, however, left the lame duck session without addressing this issue. What we have now as the current funding of Medicare will be in place until January 11, 2003. Congress resumes session January 7, 2003. So, you see, there is a very limited opportunity to affect this matter.

Here is what we need to do: 1) stop the current reimbursement reduction schedule (i.e. the proposed 4.4% cuts); 2) repeal the sustainable growth data calculations; 3) devise a system for calculating Medicare reimbursement that includes taking into account increasing numbers of Medicare patients, practice costs and new technology. You can become more informed and involved by contacting the AMA Grassroots Hotline, 800-833-6354 or www.ama-assn.org/go/grassroots.

Clearly we are in a health care crisis in this country. We must devise a way to take care of all citizens for basic medical problems. The issues are prescription coverage, uninsured, access to health care, as well as adequate reimbursement for services provided. CMS administrator Tom Scully is quoted in the November 18, 2002 issue of The AMA News "...I hope that physicians will make the decision to hang in there." The problem, Mr. Scully, is that is what we've been doing, and now we feel like we're just being hanged!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Denise L. Bobovnyik".

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Internal Medicine

The Kidney Group
1340 Belmont Ave., Ste. 2300
Youngstown, OH 44504

Medical Education: Lake Erie College, Erie, PA
Internship: Western Pennsylvania Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA
Residency: University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Pittsburgh, PA

Thomas Gemma, DO
Anesthesiology

Bel Park Anesthesia
602 Parmalee, Suite 110
Youngstown, OH 44510

Medical Education: Ohio University College of Medicine, Athens, OH
Internship: Brentwood Hospital, Warrensville Hts., OH
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Residency: University of Pittsburgh Medical Center,
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Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation

725 Boardman-Canfield Road
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Internship: Youngstown Hospital Association, Youngstown, OH
Residency: Youngstown Hospital Association, Youngstown, OH
Residency: St. Francis Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA
Fellowship: St. Francis Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA

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3660 Stutz Drive
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Rootstown, OH
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Residency: St. Elizabeth Health Center, Youngstown, OH

Sherif A. Soliman, MD
Internal Medicine/Nephrology

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Medical Education: Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt
Internship: Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt
Residency: Forum Health Northside Medical Center, Youngstown
Fellowship: Allegheny University Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA

Walter C. Sweeney, DO
Internal Medicine

Diagnostic Cardiology Associates
1325 Fifth Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44504

Medical Education: Ohio University College of Medicine, Athens, OH
Internship: Doctors Hospital, Columbus, OH
Residency: Allegheny General Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA
Fellowship: Allegheny General Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA

UPDATE ON PRINT DIRECTORY

We have been working diligently with Invizeon to get the print directory ready for distribution by mid-March, 2003. Approximately 85 of our members had new photographs taken in August, and what a good-looking group they are! Some members have opted to use the photo that was taken for the last directory in 1999-2000; if you wish to do that and have not notified the office or Invizeon, please do so as soon as possible. If you did not have a photo in the last directory, and you have a professional photo that you would like to use, forward the photo to us with a check for the \$15 insertion fee. Those who do not submit photos will have the MCMS logo appear next to their name and information. We would love to have photographs of all of our members in this directory. There are still opportunities to advertise in the directory also. Call Invizeon at 1-888-543-3424 and ask for Donna Sutton to discuss placing an ad. This directory will be distributed to members, vendors, doctors' offices, hospitals and clinics throughout the Mahoning Valley,

so your advertisement will be read by hundreds of potential customers and patients. If you have any questions about any aspect of the directory, please call Karyn at the Society office, 330-758-1624. The first proof is due in mid-December, so don't delay! A copy of the first proof will be sent to all Active members for review and correction. Please be prepared to get your corrections or approval back to the Society quickly!

In Memoriam

John N. Brucoli, MD

March 17, 1944 ~ October 9, 2002

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Bits 'n' Pieces

Thanks to all the physicians who participated in the Vindicator ad on November 3rd in support of Justice Evelyn Stratton and Lt. Gov. Maureen O'Connor. You really demonstrated "the power of many, the voice of one"!

A big THANK YOU to Alliance members Beth Bacani, Sue Berry, Gloria Detesco, Joanne Dunch, Anita Gestosani, Angela Gilliland, Karen Kohli, Maria Latorre, Ginny Pichette, Trisha Potesta and Carol Sankovic for handing out Stratton-O'Connor literature at the polling places on Election Day. A special thanks to Dolly Handel for coordinating this important activity!

Happy Holidays !

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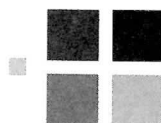
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