

AMA Should OK Good Prescription

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For most people, there's not much debate that patients have a right to information about the risks and costs of medical care. Or to a second opinion. Or to be treated with courtesy and respect. Or to be treated in a timely fashion.

But for the doctors in the American Medical Association, there's plenty of debate.

So much so that AMA delegates meeting in Honolulu last week refused to pass a patients' bill of rights, proposed by their own leadership. Even a softened version -- which replaced references to patients' "rights" with language that suggested patients "should have access" to essential health care -- didn't cut the tape.

The doctors apparently were frightened by the legal implications of admitting that patients have rights. And they might be a bit unhappy at being told, as the rejected bill of rights did, that they should disclose potential conflicts of interest, such as ownership of medical labs.

But the proposal contains other rights about which there should be no debate, among them patients' rights to have answers to all their questions, including those about costs benefits and risks of treatment; to copies of health records; and to protected communications with doctors.

What is ironic is the doctors' inability to approve even a bill of rights that consumer groups considered to be mere "lip service," "mush" and "platitudes."

What also is ironic is that this action comes as the delegates were attempting to polish the profession's public image.

That image was tarnished when Sun-Times reporters Howard Wolinsky and Tom Brune disclosed questionable financial dealings by some top AMA executives.

While the delegates did endorse AMA board actions to reform the organization's management, the board ought to go further and accept the recommendations from the group's Illinois delegates to hire outside management consultants to reorganize the AMA.

From a tax-exempt organization that represents a profession, nothing less should be expected.

The above article demonstrates three very important issues facing the chiropractic profession:

1. WE LIVE IN A FISH BOWL! Just because we aren't living in the biggest fish bowl is no reason to assume that the insurance companies, government agencies, consumer activists and the general public are not watching. The news agencies of the world are constantly monitoring all health care professions (please see page *** regarding the Kansas City Star article concerning chiropractic practice management and its effects on the image of the chiropractic profession). Health care cost and quality are the big issues right now. If we are to demand respect, we must be willing to accept scrutiny.

2. WHERE IS OUR "PATIENT BILL OF RIGHTS?" Are we truly the profession that cares about the patient? Or is that a nice image to have when you are the #2 primary health care provider?
3. WHY NOT SET THE PACE? Will we always be following medicine's lead? Will we wait for the consumer groups to pound us over the head publically before we take the initiative to produce our own "Patient Bill Of Rights?" Wouldn't it be nice to develop our own (without any pressure) and then wave it in the face of the other health care profession?

The focus on patient benefits provides the chiropractic profession with an opportunity we have never had (and may never have again). Chiropractic, the profession that provides the greatest amount of personal satisfaction to the patient, is in a position to not only answer the demand of the consumer, but to set the pace in terms of patient (consumer) responsiveness.

Our national and state associations need to re-examine their role. They need to respond to the public outcry for patient's rights and responsible health care in a manner that will promote chiropractic as a profession of concerned health visionaries, not as second class doctors competing with superior medicine.

If you are ready to be accountable, if you are prepared to go the extra mile for your patients, then chiropractic can now set the pace.

Let your state and national association know that chiropractic is prepared to be the leader in the ever-growing patient rights movement.

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THE TIME FOR CHIROPRACTIC TO TAKE THE LEAD IS NOW!

FEBRUARY 1990