Partners in Cancer Care: The American Medical Association

By Michael D. Maves, MD, MBA

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The delivery of quality health care in America today faces significant challenges on many fronts.

Through a positive, mutually supportive and collaborative relationship, the American Medical Association (AMA) and ASCO are working together to meet these challenges. It is only through the efforts of passionate, informed physicians like you that the AMA can improve the future of health care for physicians and their patients nationwide. And it

is only through organizations such as ASCO that this spirit takes root at the local level.

Our organizations have collaborated in a number of constructive ways recently. During the debate surrounding Medicare drug reimbursement cuts as proposed in the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003, the AMA worked with ASCO and other affected specialties to try to limit the impact of these cuts. The AMA also joined ASCO and other specialties in calls for more physician-friendly regulations, and created a special work group to develop new drug administration codes that resulted in payment increases that offset some of the losses on the drug side of the reimbursement equation.

ASCO has also worked with the Physician Consortium for Performance Improvement (the Consortium) to develop evidence-based clinical performance measures. The Consortium, which was convened by the AMA, includes representatives from more than 70 state and specialty medical societies, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and others. ASCO's work with the Consortium makes it more likely that oncologists will have measures that meet the standards and qualify them for additional payments if they participate in Medicare and private plans' pay-for-performance programs.

In terms of advocating for the medical profession and physicians nationwide, the AMA has three primary goals: medical liability reform (MLR), Medicare physician payment reform and regulatory relief, and expanding coverage for the uninsured and increasing access to care. On the MLR front, the AMA continues to lead an aggressive, multiyear campaign to reduce medical liability premiums in order to preserve patients' access to care. At the federal level, the AMA is fighting Congress for MICRA-like reforms (MICRA is California's Medical Injury Compensation Reform Act of 1975), including a \$250,000 cap on noneconomic damages in medical liability cases. At the state level, the AMA is providing resources to support similar state reforms.

As the leading force in Washington, DC, for Medicare reform, the AMA is relentlessly pursuing fixes to replace the flawed Medicare physician payment formula and has stopped physician payment cuts in each of the last 4 years. While that was a major accomplishment, we understand that Medicare payments are no longer keeping up with your costs, and we urge you to join us in pressing for a long-term replacement to the current formula. Visit www.ama-assn.org to obtain a kit designed to help physicians talk to patients and members of Congress about the urgent need to prevent future cuts.

The AMA can also use your help as we search for solutions to the health coverage crisis. The AMA is strongly advocating for incremental measures to expand coverage for children and lower-income families and individuals, and it is working diligently to build political pressure for action on both coverage and access to care. In the longer term, the AMA will continue to press for the adoption of a consumer-driven, market-based plan to expand coverage through tax credits and insurance market reforms.

Efforts of interest to oncologists include the AMA's Science News section, which recently held a media briefing in New York to increase awareness of revolutionary new cancer treatments and how they allow physicians to focus on both patient survival and quality of life. Also, the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* and the *Archives* specialty journals regularly publish the latest medical research on oncology-related issues.

Joining the AMA—the nation's largest medical association—is one way ASCO members and other oncologists can help address the public health, public policy, and professional issues facing medicine today. Membership also allows you to voice your opinion on medicine's top issues, influence our annual health care agenda and participate in members-only activities such as Member Connect Surveys. In addition, AMA membership offers ASCO members the latest clinical research and professional publications: free subscriptions to *JAMA*, free online access and discounted print subscriptions to *Archives* specialty journals, and discounts on AMA bookstore products.

Let's continue to join together to make a positive difference in the world of our patients and our profession.

For more information, go to www.ama-assn.org.

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