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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Howard Blumstein, MD FAAEM

At the 2010 Scientific Assembly, Larry Weiss, MD JD FAAEM, gave his President's Address at the Tuesday Afternoon Business Meeting. Then he introduced me as the new president. I spoke for a few minutes. For my first President's Message, I would like to expand on the comments I made during that introductory presentation.

First, a few words about Larry Weiss, MD JD FAAEM, as president of AAEM. Over the last two years, Larry has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Academy. Here is just a short list of issues he has addressed:

- Calls for assistance from any number of members and non-members;
- Countering efforts of alternative boards to gain inappropriate recognition from state boards;
- At least fifty visits to residency programs around the country;
- Intimate involvement with numerous legal issues, most importantly our efforts to combat the illegal involvement of lay corporations in medical professional activities;
- About a zillion calls and complaints from emergency doctors around the world.

He has handled all this with grace and patience. Not once have I heard him complain about the workload. Larry deserves our collective thanks for his tireless service. He certainly has my appreciation for being a mentor and role model. Thanks, Larry, for all you have done for us.

Now, about the future:

We are members of this Academy because we all share an ideal. That ideal is integrity.

This year's Scientific Assembly has shattered attendance records. AAEM's membership numbers are on a pace to reach new highs. We are accomplishing these feats at a time when most medical professional organizations struggle to maintain their current numbers.

I believe this represents our success in helping our fellow emergency physicians understand that our collective integrity is under attack. I intend to make integrity the watchword for my term as president.

Our professional integrity is under threat because our primary duty is to our patients. We cannot, however, always fulfill that duty when threatened by bosses who have the absolute power not only to fire us at will, but also to manipulate us after we have been fired.

Our academic integrity is under attack by alternative boards, which have gone before licensing bodies and argued that training in emergency medicine is not necessary for a physician to practice high quality emergency medicine. They argue, in essence, that our specialty is not defined by a unique body of knowledge or collection of procedural skills. That is a slap in the face of everyone who did an EM residency or has ever been involved in training residents in the ED.

As corporations establish close ties to residency programs, or even take them over, can faculty members really talk with their residents openly and honestly about the pitfalls of that practice model? Will they be punished for doing so? As chair of the AAEM Education Committee years ago, I had faculty members from such programs pull out of speaking engagements because of "political considerations." Where is the integrity?

Whenever we sign a contract that violates the law by either supporting the corporate practice of medicine or designing financial schemes that constitute kickbacks, we are putting ourselves at risk for losing our licenses. Thus, our personal integrity is also threatened.

I do not understand, frankly, why so many emergency physicians fail to understand this. Perhaps it is my failure as a debater. Maybe I am not effectively educating my peers about the issues central to the AAEM mission. But I don't think so. I think too many of our peers are afraid or unwilling to ask the hard questions. They do not want to stir up trouble.

Still, our membership grows, and I continue to hear from emergency physicians who have come to realize that complex issues threaten our specialty in ways that other specialties are just beginning to experience. They are learning that they need to add their voices to the growing call for reform from the Academy. Just like the founders of our specialty, we are blazing new trails and fighting new battles. I am excited to help lead that charge.

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