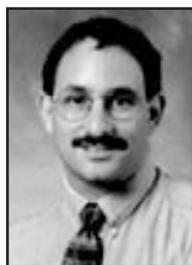




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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Howard Blumstein, MD FAAEM

Dear Colleague

I recently received a message from a fellow emergency physician. The following is my response. The only edit I made was to remove his name. Enjoy.

I received your email, which was sent to the AAEM home office in response to an email sent out to folks who had not renewed their memberships. Yours seems to be the sort of tragic story we hear all too much from emergency physicians all over the country.

My job is pretty frustrating. We get calls for help on a regular basis from docs who, like you, get screwed somehow. What's frustrating is that most of the time there is little we can do to help out. Most of the time these doctors have gotten themselves into a situation in which they have signed contracts that give them no recourse.

We have offered support where we can. We suggest that the doctor (or doctors) appeal to the medical staff of the hospital, we sometimes write a letter to the hospital administration suggesting that their new contracts are not legal or are otherwise disadvantageous, we suggest that the doctor(s) contact their state chapter of the AMA. But realistically I have not seen that help.

We have, on rare occasions, gotten involved with lawsuits in which illegal contracts were challenged in court. We have had some success, but the most recent efforts fell victim to an incompetent judge.

You are not the first emergency doc to be disappointed by what they felt to be a tepid response to a call for help. But the fact is that when contracts give the employer the right to hurt you, they are nearly impossible to reverse and it is futile to try.

In truth, the best way to deal with the sort of situations you were in is to avoid them in the first place. That is why we place so much emphasis on trying to educate residents and members about the traps that exist in our specialty. I am on the road at least once a month to speak at residency programs about these issues. If you had a fair contract to start with, you wouldn't have gotten into the trouble that

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you experienced. Yet I am willing to bet that if you received any education about contracts and job hunting, it did not address the issues that allowed your situation.

I can assure you that I am not "on the take" as you say. I work at a university hospital (Wake Forest), I get paid by the university and made less than \$5000 doing legal consulting last year, all for the defense. I get no money from contract groups and my university and my department make absolutely no money off of me except for my clinical activities. I get no time off for AAEM related activities and I get no bonus or additional financial consideration for being president, although it does reflect very well upon my department. About the only benefit I can see is that I have accumulated over 150,000 frequent flier miles related to AAEM activities.

I suggest that you contrast this with ACEP, where the President gets a handsome stipend for his/her activities.

I wish we had the resources to do more. Some members have contributed handsomely to the AAEM Foundation, which gives us a war chest that allows us to take action when the opportunity arises. But, unlike other organizations, we refuse to take donations from unscrupulous (and sometimes illegal) entities. That cuts off a big potential source of cash.

All this said, I am very sorry that AAEM was not able to meet your expectations when you were in trouble. You are not the first. I hope that physicians these days are more savvy and less likely to get into these bad legal situations. I know that our efforts already make it harder for unscrupulous and crooked business people and emergency docs to take advantage of our colleagues. I hope our continued efforts will continue to bear fruit. Only with the continued support of emergency physicians like you will we have the resources and clout to move forward.

Thanks for your consideration.

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