



Physician Advocate

The Harris County Medical Society serves as an advocate for physicians in Harris County. *Physician Advocate* is produced quarterly to provide recent highlights of HCMS advocacy on behalf of member physicians and their patients.

TMA wins ankle battle—TMA and the Texas Orthopedic Association advocated for and won the Third Court of Appeals ruling to not allow the podiatrist to expand their scope of practice to include the bones in the ankle. TMA will continue to fight for patient safety.

TMB allows monitoring of licensing—At TMA's strong urging, the Texas Medical Board (TMB) activated an online system that allows physicians to monitor the progress of their medical license application.

Medicare—All the state and specialty society delegations signed a letter urging the U.S. Senators to take legislative action now on Medicare payment. As of press time, our senators, Sen. John Cornyn and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson, broke a promise to Texas patients and physicians as well as to the TMA and AMA, by voting not to stop the 10.6-percent cut in physicians' Medicare payments. A bill to forestall that cut fell one vote short on the floor of the Senate.

TMB adopts new administrative violation rules—In response to HCMS, TMA and individual physician's complaints, the Texas Medical Board adopted new rules for administrative penalties at its Feb. 7-8 board meeting. Physicians now have the option of paying a fine for administrative matters.

HCMS helps to compare candidates—HCMS did a side-by-side comparison of the presidential candidates' positions on health care. To view it, go to www.hcms.org and click on *What's New* in the left margin.

HCMS meetings with health insurers—HCMS has been meeting with the corporate executives of the "Big Six" health insurers in Harris County, as a follow-up to the HCMS Payor Survey, which had HCMS physicians rate the performance of the six largest health insurance companies in Harris County.

Decrease administrative burdens—HCMS staff met with an Internet clearinghouse (RealMed) and three Web portals (NaviNet, Availity and Med Unify) to look at ways to decrease administrative burdens on physicians' offices. Gulf Coast MGMA members also were invited to these meetings.

TMA E-Tips offer practice information—TMA's E-Tips offer practice information. Go to www.texmed.org.

Dr. Rohack elected to AMA—Dr. Jim Rohack of Temple, TX, won an uncontested race to be president-elect of the American Medical Association.

UT-Houston med students honored—The AMA MSS named The University of Texas-Houston Chapter of the Year.

HCMS physicians elected to TMA—**Former HCMS President Dr. William H. Fleming III** was elected president-elect of TMA at TexMed. Former HCMS President **Dr. Michael E. Speer** was elected vice chair of the TMA Board of Trustees.

Dr. Butler awarded—Former HCMS and TMA President **Dr. Max Butler** received the TMA Distinguished Service Award at TexMed on May 3.

RPO honored—The HCMS Retired Physician Organization (RPO), chaired by **Dr. Shelly E. Liss**, was honored for an innovative volunteer program with The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Nursing that pairs retired physicians with nursing students. Houston Mayor Bill White and President George W. Bush commended both groups for the collaboration.

Texas physicians go to Capitol Hill—TMA President Dr. Bill Hinchey led a group of Texas physicians to personally deliver the Texas Medicare Manifesto to every member

of the Texas delegation in Congress. As part of the AMA's National Advocacy Conference, TMA contingent took part in a march to the Capitol with hundreds of physicians from across the country.

TMA Web site honored—TMA's Web site, www.texmed.org, won a bronze award in the World Wide Web Health Awards, which recognizes the best Web-based health-related content for consumers and professionals.

Disaster preparedness meeting—**Dr. Steven Brown**, chair of the HCMS Council of Hospital Chiefs of Staff, served as emcee for the combined meeting of the Council of Hospital Chiefs of Staff, Council of Specialty Societies, and HCMS Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Committee. Representatives from the Regional Hospital Preparedness Council, Houston Fire Department and Texas Medical Center outlined plans for dealing with a disaster in the Houston area. **Dr. Arlo Weltge** highlighted HCMS' capabilities to assist these organizations.

TDI TACCP meeting—On April 30, HCMS staff participated in a conference call with the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) Technical Advisory Committee on Claims Processing (TACCP). The committee is mandated to send a report to the Texas Legislature every two years.

Wine tasting & CME-to-go for young physicians—More than 50 young physicians and their guests attended an evening of networking, socializing and fun at the first-ever HCMS Wine Tasting and Networking Reception on April 29. The event offered a CME-to-Go home study course by Texas Medical Liability Trust.

Dr. Garcia speaks to hearts—HCMS President Dr. Tom Garcia was one of the featured speakers at the American Heart

Association *Go Red for Women Dinner and Auction* on May 8. He spoke about the importance of having a medical home.

Dr. Garcia gave greetings—HCMS President Dr. Tom Garcia gave the commencement address to The University of Texas-Houston 2008 graduating class.

HCMS & TMA held news conference on Medicare—HCMS and TMA worked with Sen. John Cornyn's office to hold a news conference, announcing the senator's new bill on Medicare payments. HCMS President **Dr. Tom Garcia** introduced the senator and the findings from TMA's survey on physician participation in Medicare. The news conference was covered by Univision Channel 45, Fox 26 TV and *Houston Chronicle*. Present at the news conference were **Drs. Elizabeth Torres, William Gilmer and Gary Sheppard**.

HCMS hosted free reimbursement consults—HCMS hosted 30-minute free reimbursement consultations for physicians' practices with a TMA reimbursement reimbursement specialist on March 5, 6 and 7.

Business of Medicine meetings for UT students—HCMS held Business of Medicine meetings for The University of Texas students. TMA Physician Practice Consulting provided, to more than 150 students, an overview on starting a medical practice on March 24. On March 26, more than 150 students attended a panel discussion to hear about the benefits and drawbacks of different practice settings such as solo, multi-specialty group, partnership, academic, and hospitalists. The panelist consisted of: **Drs. Arlo Weltge, William Gilmer, Yassar Ahmed, Patrick Carter, and Brad Patt**. Other programs included Feb. 11 meeting on staffing a practice by Medserv as well as debt management and financial planning by TMA Insurance Trust.

Alliance Gala—HCMS President **Dr. Tom Garcia** and former HCMS President **Dr. Michael V. Kelly II** were honored at the HCMS Alliance Gala on March 8. HCMS President Elect **Dr. Lewis E. Foxhall**, HAM President **Dr. Guru N. Reddy** and HAM Vice President **Dr. Betty Jo Edwards** also attended and represented HCMS and HAM.

HCMS Alliance Installation—Dr. Tom Garcia presented flowers to the new HCMS Alliance president, Connie Maddox, during her installation on May 20. He acknowledged the tremendous support the Alliance provides.

Media coverage—In March, HCMS provided KUHF 88.7 Radio (NPR) with information on the uninsured emergency room care and health care for a town hall meeting. On March 12, **HCMS President Elect Dr. Lewis E. Foxhall** was interviewed on the HCMS health insurance survey by *Modern Physician Magazine* and *Modern Healthcare Magazine*. On March 27, HCMS and TMA held a news conference on Medicare with Sen. John Cornyn. **Drs. Tom Garcia, William Gilmer, Elizabeth Torres, and Gary Sheppard** met with the news media. Univision TV Channel 45 and Fox 26 TV interviewed **Dr. Tom Garcia** and **Dr. Elizabeth Torres** on Medicare. **HCMS Executive Vice President and CEO Greg Bernica** was interviewed for an article "Insurers face pressure to dish spending details" published June 13 in the *Houston Business Journal*. On June 15, *Texas Medical Center News* published an article and photograph on the Francis C. Moore winners.

HCMS honors journalists—Drs. Tom Garcia, Guru N. Reddy, William Gilmer and Stuart Abramson attended the annual HCMS/HAM Francis C. Moore, MD, Medical Journalism awards luncheon on May 21. As the featured speaker, Dr. Garcia presented to the journalists *The Need for a Medical Home*. Drs. Reddy and Garcia presented 12 awards in 6 categories to print, television and radio journalists.

Medical Home—HCMS has kicked off its project to educate the community about the need for a medical home. Flyers have been distributed to all branch meetings. **Dr. Tom Garcia** has presented the topic at an American Heart Association event and the HCMS/HAM Francis C. Moore, MD, Medical Journalism Awards luncheon in May.

Business Expo—More than 220 physicians and office personnel attend the semi-annual free HCMS Business Expo on May 17 at Reliant Center. The Expo offered three

free CME seminars and products and services for the physician's practice from 70 vendors.

Business Community Liaison Committee—The HCMS Ad Hoc Business Community Committee has been obtaining information from large employers and their consultants on how they select their health care administrative services and develop benefit packages. TMA has been collaborating with the National Federation of Independent Businesses on transparency in the health insurance market. The Committee also met with TMA representatives on June 26 to discuss coordinating our activities with employers and with the TMA 2009 Legislative efforts.

Litigation Center—The AMA and state medical societies jointly fund a litigation center that assists physicians with lawsuits that broadly impact the profession. The center reported on its activities at the AMA meeting. The litigation center filed suit on March 15, 2000, against UnitedHealthcare (UHC) challenging the basis for calculating usual and customary reimbursements to physicians. UHC's subsidiary, Ingenix, provides this data to most national insurance companies. New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo has joined the suit. The litigation center participated in the successful Texas lawsuit to prevent podiatrists from expanding their scope of practice.

Houston Business Group On Health (HBGH) Survey—On June 17, HCMS staff attended the HBGH meeting in which its 2008 Healthcare Cost & Benefits Trends Survey results were presented.

Member Survey—A survey was e-mailed to all members with e-mail addresses on record requesting input on HCMS services. We have received more than 400 responses to date. The input will be used by the strategic planning committee as it develops our 2009 plan.