



With Members in Mind

1. Sick and Tired

Since becoming a parent this past year, I often find myself thinking about comedian Bill Cosby and his sketches on parenthood. One favorite routine of mine details the practice of Cosby's own mother constantly stating that she was "Sick and Tired" of one thing or another. If you have heard it you will remember that Bill goes on to recount that the word "sick" was always followed by the word "tired" when used by his mother. He says the worst beating he ever received as a child was when his mother claimed that she was "sick..." and a young Bill chimed in with "And tired!" before his mother could finish the mantra herself.

Now this is not a lead in for an anemia treatment commercial, but I am sick and tired as well. Sick... and tired of the stories by the press about fat in the reimbursement made to community based oncology practices. To avoid the obvious recap of the recent Washington Post and now almost year old NY Times articles, I will say that only when the nitty gritty of the daily oncology practice grind is portrayed in the media will my fatigue and nausea subside.

You and I understand that money allows the clinic doors to stay open and money will also help attract the brilliant personnel needed to deal with the complexity of treating such an overwhelming disease. But, if the only requirement to run a cancer care center was greed, we would have no shortage of qualified applicants. Thankfully, lust for money isn't on the list, proven by the fact that there are more lucrative and somewhat simpler ways to make a profit and that there are fewer than 4,000 independent oncologists in the USA.

I challenge you to ask anyone desiring information for the purpose of publication to visit your office and see the activity that

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goes on. Find out if the journalists have the guts that it takes to put on a brave face or provide a set of arms to hold someone who has just been diagnosed with cancer. Ask those who write with a sharp pen to be compassionate listeners while juggling 40 plus patients a day and administer counseling over the phone to 10 more. While holding it together and making breakthroughs in treatment protocols show the *all-knowing* writers how to simultaneously resubmit (for the 3rd or is it the 4th time?) a claim that has been denied by a government computer with a software glitch. Before your newly enlightened guests leave the clinic, invite them back for the next day and the next day and the next. When they ask why, tell them because you will be there, everyday, doing the job you love.

I think we would all be pleased with the lack of words initially available to the news reporters when they attempt to describe a day in the clinic. I will bet that when the newspapers quote reimbursement figures it will be clear that there is not enough money in the world to take the place of what you do.

2. Strength of Relationships

In the challenging reimbursement atmosphere you are facing today, many groups are promising all sorts of new ways to help your practice. I applaud anyone in the marketplace who is delivering true value to the independent practicing physician as OA has and will continue to provide. My words of caution are simply before you sign up for the most recent deal offered to your practice, ask yourself, "If a deal can be made now, why wasn't this offer extended to me previously?" OA is proud of the relationships forged with its members, manufacturers and distributor. OA has consistently made available the best savings, services and education to you the member without keeping options in reserve.

By way of direct interaction with our member physicians, nurses and practice managers we have learned what is most needed to maintain a healthy practice in any climate. Your attendance at events, response to our calls and faxes and overall performance on product agreements confirms that OA makes a difference in your office. Thank you for your support.

I was once told that when times are good, any individual would be able to shine. It is only when the going gets tough that true colors show through clearly and true friendships are affirmed. I urge you to review each of the communications we send to your office and comment as needed to enhance the well being of all OA members. Let me know what OA can do for you in 2004. My staff and I will respond to your requests for assistance in continuing to provide the best cancer care possible.

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