

Let me begin by congratulating Dr. Allan Perel for providing outstanding leadership for the society this year. I would also like to express deep appreciation for the dedicated work of our staff Terri Minichello and Annmarie Giammanco, as well as all the dedicated doctors of the Comitia Minora for donating countless hours to achieve this success. We are truly indebted to you.



*Vincent Calamia, MD,  
President*

As I assume this year, the position as the 203rd president of the Richmond County Medical Society, I am highly cognizant of the heavy responsibility this office holds. As physicians we are indeed experiencing the “curse of living in interesting times.” We are beset by a multitude of unfunded mandates accompanied by unprecedented scrutiny from regulators and insurers alike. We are transitioning our practices with conversion to electronic health records that will require significant investment and initial loss of productivity and thus revenue. We are saddled with ever escalating malpractice premiums and the enormous cost of running a small business with staffs that require and deserve increases in wages and health care coverage.

Despite collectively being among the largest provider of jobs in the city we are unlike other businesses in that we cannot pass these costs on to the consumers. In fact, we struggle as individual providers to maintain our fees from monopolistic HMO’s and likewise constantly face a decrease in fees from the Medicare SGR formula. In addition, a recent prestigious study performed by several major universities documented that the cost to each individual physician in interacting with health plans is an astounding \$68,274 per physician, per year!

Is it any surprise many physicians particularly in primary care and Ob/Gyn are forced to leave or limit their practice or leave the state? Don Berwick of the Institute of Medicine proclaims that “Every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results that it gets.” Is not this current system perfectly designed to produce the crisis in primary care that it has successfully achieved?

The problems we face are very real and they are daunting. They are coincident with the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. On Jun 15th President Barak Obama delivered a speech to the AMA outlining some of the principles in his plans to massively overhaul the Health Care System as it attempts to expand to universal coverage. Whether evolution or revolution, these proposals clearly will come at a time of great stress for the current medical providers, which include not only physicians, but hospitals, SNF’s, home agencies, and other components of the health care continuum. It is absolutely essential that physicians play an active role in designing and revising these proposals.

This can only be done with a strong and united voice through our medical society. About half of the active physicians on Staten Island are currently members of the RCMS. The optimist will say the cup is half full, but the reality in this time of great change is that it is half empty. In this fluid and dangerous environment apathy or indifference is not an option. We must make a concerted effort to recruit physicians into the society and encourage broader involvement from more members who can give their time. As per recent precedent, I am requesting that all physician members be welcomed at the Comitia meetings.

In addition to my commitment to recruitment of new members, I will focus on several specific issues. Physician ability to contract with payors on a fair playing field requires some form of

collective bargaining and some of our legislators have had good proposals in this area and we will pursue these. Legislation that hold the payors to fair and timely compensation for our services is an important goal.

The tort reform issue is essential to patient access and to the survival of independent practitioners, yet it is highly emotionally charged. It is essential we form alliances to promote reform among all stakeholders and try to build some consensus in areas where legislative support is possible.

Building upon a foundation of efforts by my predecessors, it is important that we work with the existing coalition of our hospitals, legislators, and the medical society to address the inequity of funding to Staten Island from the City of New York. As the recent study commissioned by the Richmond County Medical Society pointed out, there are multiple areas of paradoxically poor outcomes in mortality and morbidity on Staten Island compared to the other boroughs and undoubtedly some of this is due to the disproportionately small share of health care dollars provided to Staten Island compared to the rest of the city. We will continue to aggressively pursue availability of capital for our two hospital systems. It is also important to work with the HHC and the Primary Care Development Corporation to have these city entities help provide coordinated primary care to our borough in conjunction with the two hospital systems.

None of these issues is easily resolved but there can be no resolution if we are not united and resolute in purpose. We cannot remain as independent silos or change will simply overwhelm us and we will take the position of bystanders.

We are greatly privileged to be physicians. Make no mistake, there is no profession that can bring a greater sense of fulfillment than ours, but it comes with great responsibility. First and always we must be dedicated to our patients and to the general well being of our society, but equally, we have a responsibility to our colleagues to assure that we can all practice in a system of high quality and adequate resources. Most importantly we are responsible to leave a legacy for those that follow us in our profession to safeguard the patient-physician relationship and provide them with the tools to deliver the best healthcare possible. Let us not be guilty of standing by while major changes occurred on our watch.

*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for men to do nothing.* Edmund Burke

Let me conclude by expressing my gratefulness to my friends and my family. To my parents, who were devoted to making the dreams of their four children a reality. To my wife Elaena, and our children, Alex and Kathryn, for their unconditional love and support. This I truly cherish.

Thanks to all of you for your trust in me.

I look forward to working together with you throughout the year.