

I would like to thank all the physicians who joined me in Albany on March 3rd for our annual Legislative Day. There were over 1300 physicians statewide who traveled to Albany to discuss the issues that are relevant to us. Public officials including Governor Patterson; State Senate Majority Leader Malcom Smith; State Minority Leader Dean Skelos; and the Commissioner of Health, Dr. Richard Daines, addressed us. They were quite positive in their message to us, leaving me with the perception that our elected officials realize the major problems that physicians are currently facing. What has become readily obvious is that the problems we, the physicians, face have also become problems for the community that we serve.

As small business owners, our financial stability is crucial for employment since, on Staten Island, the hospitals and physicians are the largest single non-governmental employer. We petitioned our elected officials who instituted a freeze on raising malpractice rates for one year, which will expire this June and so the fight is not over yet. With astronomical malpractice rates, despite the one-year moratorium, access to care is still a major problem.

It is obvious that our public officials are concerned about the solvency of our malpractice carriers and are negotiating a number of solutions that have been proposed. Malpractice reform is crucial if the physicians in the State of New York are to survive. Also, it is vital for the residents of Staten Island, our patients, to have easy access to quality health care, which they are so deserving of.

I have been proud this year, as the president of the Richmond County Medical Society, to continue the tremendous work that our past presidents and members of the Comitia Minora had begun in discussions with the mayor's office regarding the need for more city funding on Staten Island. As you know there is no Health and Hospital Corporation acute hospital on Staten Island. Our patients desperately need affordable pharmacy services, local diagnostic and treatment centers, as well as more and better-funded primary care clinics. We are asking only for our fair share as taxpayers in New York City. The Medical Society has made tremendous strides in the fight for our borough and hopefully we will see some tangible results before the mayoral election.

For generations hospitals have independently sought city support, but our present attempt to procure funding is a joint effort, spearheaded by the Medical Society and in collaboration with Richmond University Medical Center and Staten Island University Hospital toward one goal, quality health care for all Staten Islanders. I personally want to thank the CEOs of both hospitals, Anthony Ferreri and Richard Murphy, for their tireless efforts in trying to bring high-quality tertiary care to each and every Staten Islander. I am proud to work for a group of physicians on Staten Island, who I feel, are world class, not only in their specialty but also in their dedication to our profession.

Richmond County is unique to have such a strong relationship with our local elected officials. I have been able to meet with Borough President Molinaro, Congressman McMahon, State Senators Lanza and Savino, Assembly members Cusick, Tobacco, Titone and Hyer-Spencer and I feel certain they all share the same concern as the physicians...to bring better services to the residents of Staten Island. Our City Council members, Oddo and Ignizio, have been very receptive and have taken an active role in this effort. It's important that we have record numbers in attendance at this year's Legislative Brunch on Sunday, May 17. Please mark your calendars to save the date and watch your regular mail and/or e-mail for a formal notice.

Lastly, with the democratic control of state government we are hopeful, through their speeches in Albany, that a more even playing field with managed care companies can be achieved in this legislative session. It is not fair that we are not able to pass on overhead cost. The ultimate goal would be collective bargaining, which is also on the table for discussion.

Through the work of the Medical Society of the State of New York, our needs and concerns are being addressed in the most diligent and professional way possible.



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President*