



**Sierra Sacramento Valley Medicine**  
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**President's Message**  
**2009 — Our 155th Year**



By Charles H. McDonnell, III, MD

**With the country in a recession and healthcare reform on the front burner, all physicians need to step up to the plate.**

*This talk by Dr. McDonnell at the SSVMS Annual Meeting has been lightly edited for print.*

AS I LOOK ACROSS THE AUDIENCE tonight I see many members and guests who I admire and who are very dear to me.

I want to thank all of you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to share this evening with us at this important time in history for our profession and organized medicine.

I joined the Medical Society's Board of Directors in 2004. While on the Board, I observed Doctors Pan, Chatterjee, Sandhu, Jones and Parsons serve as presidents with aplomb. With the help of Executive Director Bill Sandberg and Associate Director Chris Stincelli, they emphasized community service and advocacy.

They updated the society's policies and procedures, fine-tuned the society's finances, bolstered membership and even replaced the windows in our building, initiating a green movement for the SSVMS.

We heard Dr. Parson's talk about the success of the Medical Society this past year. I want to take this opportunity to speak with you about our challenges today, how I think we can meet those challenges and my vision for a successful future.

Today's global healthcare reforms and initiatives impact us directly at the local level. As your new Medical Society President, I will continue to facilitate and encourage the collective voice that we as physicians must have in this great society.

As we all know, I am not the only new President entering office this January of 2009. and it is no secret that our new American President is pursuing health care reform.

That being said, I must stress the importance of our being a part of whatever directions are formulated for the future evolution in healthcare - to not only ensure the protection of our physicians, but to also protect and improve the healthcare provided to our patients and community.

Then there is the economic crisis; a crisis leading to increasingly desperate and drastic cuts in medical services as more and more people are losing their jobs and health insurance. In light of such powerful forces of instability, now is not the time to bow out of SSVMS and CMA.

In fact, it is the time to not only step up to the plate as a member of this society, but to also be active in SSVMS and truly become part of the voice and modern evolution of organized medicine. In our profession the phrase "be global, act local" rings especially true and especially now. I firmly believe that we cannot make a difference statewide or nationally, if we cannot protect the physicians and patients today in our own backyard, and maintain and improve the reputation, prestige and standing that our pioneering colleagues built for us.

The very birth of organized medicine in California was in response to a crisis, a public health disaster - the cholera epidemic of 1850. It was this society that established the first public health department and led to the CMA's founding of the California State Department of Health in the 1870s.

SSVMS and the CMA continued to rise to many other challenges. BloodSource was created in 1948 in response to local blood shortages. NORCAL Mutual Insurance Company was founded in 1975 in response to a malpractice insurance crisis - and always, SSVMS was there leading the way, successful, resourceful, active and indispensable.

There is no doubt about it, the number one advantage to being a member of this society in 2009 is the representation that we provide for physicians to the CMA, city, county and state in legislative and legal advocacy. There is just no doubt.

Who will represent future doctors to government? Who will look after the patient-physician relationship and our role as independent patient advocates? It will be the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society - and, to be effective, we physicians must work together and be active. We must not be divided.

Annually there is legislation that eventually affects all physicians, even if they practice in a closed system or are employed by the government. Whether it's about insurance companies rescinding patients' coverage or scope of practice, the SSVMS and CMA are there. Of course, the most powerful example of our continued legislative success is the landmark MICRA legislation, which alone saves the average physician (member or not) over \$70,000 a year.

Our current legal battles include challenging the legality of the Medi-Cal cuts and balanced billing regulations. Our success thus far with Medi-Cal cuts and the recent RICO suits (which returned millions of dollars to physicians) are examples of how membership benefits return much more than the cost of membership.

The question is not, "Can a physician afford to be a member of the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society and CMA?" but, "Can one afford not to?"

Subspecialty medical societies alone can't represent the interests of all physicians. And although the importance of specialty societies cannot be discounted, especially at the federal level, they cannot speak as one. They do not provide nearly as powerful a voice in California as CMA and the local medical societies. Again, the power of the Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society and CMA comes from the collective voices of many in the profession.

Early on in this organization, it was a necessity for physicians in the Sacramento area to be a member to be considered credible by peers. We are now at that time again. We set the standard then and we can set

it again. One of our greatest strengths is that we are a purely volunteer physician organization not beholden to anyone else's actions but our own.

So we must continue to trumpet and market to non-members the recent and evolving successes that make this organization prestigious and noteworthy, emphasizing our actions and influence at local, state and federal levels and our success in competing against the other many special interests.

As your president, I will work to insure that we remain dedicated to upholding the authority and autonomy of physicians in the delivery of professional and ethical medical care. It is with the sincerest honor and privilege that I look forward to serving you as president of our Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society, to carry on the tradition of dignity, honor and prestige of an organization that truly cares about the patients of the Sacramento region and the physicians who serve them.

Let's get the job done and let's continue to make a difference.

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