

Chief of

Staff FROM MY PERSPECTIVE



Saved by the bell! We can all breathe a sigh of relief now that Congress has, at the very last minute, reached a compromise that postpones, at least for two more months, a 27 percent cut in Medicare physician reimbursement rates. If this story sounds familiar, then you might be remembering last year, or perhaps the past several years before that. Indeed, the struggle over the flawed formula for calculating these rates has plagued legislators, as well as physician groups and lobbyists, since 2002.

What is the "sustainable growth rate?" The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 created this formula, a means of calculating the annual target for the amount that the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) should spend on billed physician services. Lawmakers envisioned that this formula would keep expenditures for physician services on a sustainable trajectory in line with the growth of the nation's Gross Domestic Product. Since 2002, the total annual cost for physician services has ballooned every year, while our GDP has not. Thus, the CMS target is more and more off the mark each year. And each year, the Balanced Budget Act mandates a correction (cut) in physician pay to compensate for this difference.

Naturally many lobby groups and lawmakers themselves have advocated for a revision of this formula, to no avail. Lawmakers cannot agree on how to pay the at least \$276 billion that would be required now even to guarantee a pay freeze for physicians. For now, the SGR-mandated cut has been averted, and Congress will begin debating again in two months how to arrive at a long-term solution. Until then, physicians, especially self-employed ones, hang on uncertainly, wondering if a pay cut will finally make it impossible to care for Medicare beneficiaries.

Dr. Roland Goertz, past president of the American Academy of Family Physicians, remarked, "Congress must reform Medicare payment so that patients know they have access to care when they need (it), physicians can be assured of appropriate payment for their expertise, and the health care system as a whole can anticipate and control costs without shifting those costs onto the shoulders of physicians and other health care providers."

As Dr. Goertz' comment suggests, cutting fees to physicians could easily lead to worsening the crisis if physicians can't afford to take care of these patients, who then seek late care in emergency settings.

As physicians we can do our part in two ways. First, we can stay involved through our physician associations and as individual constituents and voters. Secondly, and most importantly, we can remember, with each decision of our day, that we are all custodians of resources. We should feel responsible for every service we provide and every test that we order, making sure that each test informs our management and each procedure offers benefits for the patient.

Is it really necessary to order another lipid panel, when the last one three months ago was at target? Is there really not a generic medication that will work as well as a new brand-named one? Should I recommend or offer hemodialysis to a nursing home resident with cognitive decline? Regardless of our patient's payor source, we should always strive to provide the best and safest care with the least possible waste. Hopefully legislators and other stakeholders in our complex and fragmented health care system will do the same.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Kearns, MD
Chief of Staff

EMC DESIGNATED HEART ATTACK RECEIVING CENTER

Emanuel Medical Center is now an official STEMI Receiving Center for Stanislaus County heart attack patients. Effective Jan. 1, the designation completes the launch of Turlock's first-ever cardiovascular program and means that ambulances now bring patients experiencing a heart attack directly to EMC for treatment and intervention during the critical early stages, instead of to Modesto.

Emanuel's Cardiac Cath and Interventional Lab opened in 2010 and the first open heart surgery was performed last May. The next phase of the cardiac program is opening two new cardiac operating suites, including a cutting-edge hybrid room where the surgical table is integrated with an interventional radiology scanner normally found in a catheterization lab. That integration allows one surgeon to control both the table and the scanner and will allow Emanuel doctors to treat two emergency patients at once.

Informational Meeting

Important Changes to Medi-Cal in Stanislaus County: Understanding the Implications to Your Practice

6 pm Thurs., Feb. 16 in Conf. Room C. RSVP to Alicia Zavala (209) 461-2280.

- Learn why Medi-Cal will look different in 2013.
- Find out how you can help your patients navigate the changes.
- Share your ideas about the changes.

Speakers: Dale Bishop, MD, Medical Director, Health Plan of San Joaquin, and David Hurst, VP of Marketing and Public Affairs, Health Plan of San Joaquin.

CUTTING EDGE SKIN CARE COMES TO TURLOCK AREA

Board-certified physician, scientist and inventor Basil M. Hantash, MD, PhD, has changed the landscape of skin care services offered in the area. He and his partner, MOHS surgeon Neal M. Ammar, MD, purchased the practice of long-time Turlock dermatologist John Willson, MD, in January 2011. The Advanced Skin Care Institute is the result.

"We put together a team that covers all the necessary services for medical, surgical and cosmetic skin care needs," Dr. Hantash says. "For example, we do all Mohs skin cancer surgeries right in the Turlock office. One of the sentiments that exists in the Central Valley is that you have to go out of town to get cutting edge care. We want people to know that sometimes cutting edge care comes to town."

We want to deliver that to our patients and change the approach that has existed."

Also on staff are medical assistants, a physician's assistant trained in the latest skin care services such as lasers, Botox, and fillers, as well as two aestheticians who perform facials, chemical peels and microdermabrasion.

Constrained by the small size of its current office, the group is relocating to the second floor of a new building at 3800 Geer and hopes to move in by the third quarter of this year. The new facility will be 4,500 sq. ft. and will allow the practice to bring in all the technology that doesn't fit right now.

"We will be able to expand our service offerings to include all the newest technologies (such as laser resurfacing, photorejuvenation, body sculpting, laser hair removal, tattoo removal and liposuction) that we are trained in and helped develop and bring to market," Dr. Hantash says.

Similar to the current office, the doctors will have a functional pathology lab so that all biopsies can be read in-house. "It provides for a better diagnosis when you have the lab right there," he adds. "You can look at the patient's medical history as you're examining the histopathology. It's the optimal context to provide a diagnosis."

Dr. Hantash was valedictorian of both his medical and graduate school classes at New Jersey Medical School where he earned a medical degree as well as a PhD in pharmacology and physiology. From 2003 to 2007 he attended Stanford University to complete a dermatology residency and do postdoctoral training in regenerative medicine and a fellowship in biodesign innovation.

While there he discovered and patented laser-dependent mechanisms that led to the first and only FDA- approved treatment of melasma. A self described "serial entrepreneur," he is the founder, chairman and CEO of Escape Therapeutics, Inc., a biotech company based in the Silicon Valley that makes universal stem cell-based curative therapeutics to relieve the suffering of children and adults afflicted with incurable and inadequately treated diseases and injuries. The company focuses primarily on type I diabetes, acute myocardial infarction and acute and chronic skin wounds.

Dr. Hantash credits his training at Stanford for fostering his interest in research and development. "You have the ability to get exposed to all the different facets of medicine there," he says. "I was able to use those opportunities to develop these therapies and also provide better dermatology tools for patients."

His research led to over a dozen FDA product approvals, over 100 publications and the creation of three breakthrough laser platforms (Re-pair™, Re-store™ and Re-fine™), two microdermabrasion devices (Silkpeel™ MD and Spa), and Lumixyl™, a skin lightening system.

Dr. Hantash worked at Kaiser Permanente in Fremont as a pool dermatologist from 2005-2010 and in 2010 earned an MBA with honors in finance from The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania.

"That effort was primarily driven because when I spun a biotech company out of my research at Stanford, I had no formal business training. It fit exactly what my needs were."

Advanced Skin Institute is accepting new patients of any age and is located at 1199 Delbon Ave., Suite 2, in Turlock. Dr. Hantash can be reached at (209) 668-3063.



Dr. Basil Hantash

February CME

Programs are approved for one hour of CME credit and begin at 12:30 pm in Conf. Room C. Lunch is included.

Tues., Feb. 21 – David Ellertson, MD, "Varicose Vein Management."

Tues., Feb. 28 – Robert Appleton, MD, "Heart Murmurs."

General Medical Staff Meeting

6 pm Mon., Feb. 6
Conference Room C

All medical staff members are invited to attend. Dinner will be served.