



THE PRESIDENT-ELECT MESSAGE

FROM PATRICIA LANOIE BLANCHETTE MD, MPH

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Patricia Lanoie Blanchette MD, MPH

To my medical colleagues,

It is in the spirit of service that I assume the presidency of the Hawaii Medical Association. We are a diverse group of physicians, identified by specialty, type of practice, ethnicity and culture, religion, political beliefs and personalities. However, we are very similar in our professionalism, integrity, and in the good fortune to be graced with the ability to practice medicine.

HMA was founded in 1856 with a royal charter at a time when various types of practitioners, many without proper training, held themselves out to be physicians. Membership in the HMA, with emblem proudly displayed, assured patients that they had indeed found a properly trained medical doctor. How much has changed in the past 100 years, but in some ways, very little. It is with pride of profession and in the spirit of service that we should join or renew our membership.

I am also proud to be a graduate of the John A. Burns School of Medicine. In 1984, after completing my residency and fellowship training, I returned to Hawaii. Dr. Lou Hefley soon thereafter invited me to an annual HMA meeting. I told her that I didn't know anyone and would feel lost. She said, "You know me." She also explained that HMA was the best route to a collective voice for physicians and had great potential for the public good. She introduced me to HMA leadership and I met many physicians who had sustained many years of service to the organization, but most importantly, to the people of this state.

Individually, we are just too busy and work too hard to sustain the effort that it takes to make substantive improvements in the environment of care. We need to work together, regardless of our differences. HMA also provides extraordinary service in ways from which we all benefit. For example, HMA oversees most of the CME programs in the state and established the HCCME, which accredits many CME events presented in Hawaii. We also save lives as well as professions with HMA's work in physicians' health and in risk management. Countless misunderstandings among patients are resolved by tactful and knowledgeable staff. Together, we tackle the tough societal and practice problems to make a real difference.

When I was a medical student, I met a businessman on a plane who was amused at the size of a textbook from which I was studying. He strongly advised me that I was making a big mistake going into medicine. He told me that in the U.S. we like our businessmen rich and our doctors poor. I told him that I was going into geriatrics and I was pretty sure that I would never be rich. He rolled his eyes and said that I should try to make money some other way and give away my medical service. I would be pretty much doing that anyway. I laugh sometimes in remembering that conversation, because changes in reimbursement have resulted in a pretty good shot at trying to make doctors poor. Doctors' fees and reimbursements to hospitals and nursing homes are now less than the cost of providing the highest quality that people deserve. On average, new physicians finish 12 to 17 years of training over \$130,000 in debt. Too much of the care has been put into the hands of less qualified providers. Poorly designed managed care without physician leadership has been a national disgrace.

These misdirected attacks on reimbursement, coupled with unlimited malpractice awards, have combined to threaten patient access to care. In Hawaii, doctors in high-risk specialties are leaving, retiring early, and limiting their practices. Recruiting for certain specialties and finding consistent coverage are nearly impossible. We who have devoted our lives to providing the best in medical care need to work together, now more than ever, for the public good. We must have our voices heard. Regardless of specialty, HMA unites us.

I welcome your help, advice and friendship as I continue in the great HMA tradition of responsible medical leadership for this state.

With Warmest Aloha,
Patricia Lanoie Blanchette MD, MPH

EDITOR'S NOTE:

President Blanchette's message was delivered at the 149th Annual Meeting of the Hawaii Medical Association on Sunday, October 23, 2005 in the Hawaii Convention Center.