



# View From the Pyramids

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## EDITORIAL

Health care has become big business, and health care systems have expanded by buying private practices, hospitals, laboratories, and imaging centers. These corporations are the only option that some patients have if the coverage area is dense and vast. This has become useful as a large number of physicians utilize the same electronic health record system to capture metric data and apply sweeping public health initiatives; however, this has also led to an increase in administration layering and oversight. This, in turn, has at times placed the needs of the administration above those of the patients and physicians and is removing the empathy and humanism from the medical profession.

After working as a musician, a landscaper, and a construction worker, I went to college at the age of 23. I graduated *cum laude* from Stony Brook University's Honors College in New York with a bachelor's degree in physical chemistry. Despite this, when I met with the premedical adviser, he told me I was too old and had no chance of getting into medical school. He refused to write my pre-med application letter. He was the first in a line of small-minded bureaucrats lining up to hold me back.

I succeeded in medical school, served as OMM/Anatomy fellow and went on to get 3 board certifications. Like many of us, I have sacrificed much to get where I am, which is why I take Godzilla-sized offense by being downgraded to a *provider* or *practitioner* and when middle-management rubes condescendingly explain the realities of medicine as if they ever had to work with patients.

We, physicians, and in particular osteopathic physicians, are a very special group. We are important to our patients, to our hospitals, and to the future of medical policy. We are the fuel that drives the engine of medicine and generates the lion's share of the funds that pay for the swelling overhead of running a hospital, office, etc. At staff meetings or retirement speeches, we hear about noble sacrifices, and are praised for commitment to our patients, yet at other times we need to "get in line" and get treated like errant children.

I don't blame the systems, or the administration for this trend; I blame us. We have been complicit in our own diminishment. We have allowed our own importance to decline, and we have passively watched as these behemoth health care systems have swelled. We have stood by and watched as institutional rules have removed

many of the choices that used to be the providence of the doctor-patient interaction.

We have done what we were told, been flexible for the sake of the team, and what we got was increased administrative staff-to-physician ratios, less pay, and more administrative burden hoisted upon us.

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“ Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible.

—Frank Zappa<sup>1</sup>

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But all is not lost. We can still regain our collective *amour propre* and take our place once more as the leaders of health care as a group that still commands high levels of respect from the public. I propose:

1. When we make decisions with our patients as the priority, we will tend to choose the right course.
2. Outside of work, *we* become our patient and keep focused on what *that* patient needs. We must leave the constant patient insurgency behind so that we can maintain ourselves and reclaim our personal power.
3. We engage in fitness and develop interest areas that allow us to vent all the sadness, misery, frustrations, and intensity that is woven into our daily existence. In short, we become the example our patients will want to follow.

I am proud to be an osteopathic physician, and I feel the power and the distinction of what we do, stretching back to the 19th century and rocketing into the 21st century. I imagine all the osteopaths who fought for rights that we now take for granted are beside me when I treat my patients.

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The rise of large health care systems propagates administration bloat, and with that structure we lose the very qualities that our patients admire. The large systems' approach to medicine removes empathy, compassion, individualism, and the osteopathic distinctiveness that we hold so sacred. If we allow this trend to continue, I feel we are dishonoring our past and risk being dragged down into obscurity. Our patients and our profession are worth fighting for.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as editor of *The AAO Journal*. It has been an honor and a privilege that I will cherish. ■

### Reference

1. Zappa F, Occhiogrosso P. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*. New York, NY: Touchstone; 1999:185.