“Health Care Reform: What Does This Mean for UNM Surgery?”

Despite all the screw-ups associated with its implementation, Health Care Reform (a.k.a. The Affordable Care Act, “Obamacare”) WILL be implemented in New Mexico. You’ve seen the T.V. ads for the New Mexico Health Exchange, and patients (including current UNM Care Patients) are being enrolled. Will it be good or bad for UNM Surgery? The bottom line – that depends.

In the short term, Health Care Reform will almost assuredly be good for our bottom line. Given the downward trend in our clinical finances over the past two years, this should be taken as good news. Over the past two years, Medicare payments for services have declined (and with that, payments from other insurers that are, in the end, tied to Medicare reimbursement rates), the fraction of uninsured patients has increased, and the “days in receivable” (a measure of bad debt for clinical services provided) has increased. The negative impact on Surgery is not unique – all UNM clinical departments are seeing these trends. However, decreasing clinical revenues, especially in the face of rising clinical expenses (our work RVU’s have actually increased, but with increased surgical supply and faculty salary costs), is never good. When you lose money on each case, you simply can’t “make it up on volume”.

In the mid-1960’s, conservative pundits, and most particularly the AMA, predicted dire financial consequences if the Great Society Programs of Medicare and Medicaid were enacted. What ensued was the biggest growth stimulus (and financial boon) American Medicine has ever experienced. Suddenly, two medically disenfranchised groups - the elderly and unemployed women (and their children) were given purchasing power to satisfy pent-up demand for medical services. Likely the same thing will happen in New Mexico when an estimated 175,000 uninsured individuals obtain insurance coverage. Sure, some of the newly-insured patients (and some current UNM Care patients) will seek their care at Lovelace or Presbyterian Hospitals. Undoubtedly, however, our fraction of uninsured/self-pay patients will decrease. We will get paid for services we presently provide for free, and that has to be good for us financially.

How LARGE will this financial increment be? Hard to tell, really. Some current Medicaid and Medicare programs, such as the SCI program and the Upper Payment Limit and Disproportionate Share payments, may go away. The NM Medicaid payment rates may decrease. Some patients have lost their employer-based health insurance, and when those patients finally land in an “Obamacare plan”, their insurance coverage (and our payments) may well be less than before. On the
other hand, some “health insurance plans” that weren’t worth the paper they were printed on will disappear, and those individuals will move (although probably grudgingly) into plans that at least attempt to provide comprehensive health care coverage.

Financially, the short-term is likely good for us. The long-term is much less clear. Our clinical service capacity in Surgery is already stretched to the limit, and a significant and sustained increase in service demand will assuredly overwhelm this capacity. As an institution we’ve been unsuccessful to date in convincing our state governmental leadership of the dire need for more inpatient beds, OR’s and clinics on this campus (i.e., the Lands West clinical expansion). SRMC is a help (and a clinical resource we MUST maximize), but it does not replace our current needs on the HSC Campus or fully address the obvious long-term need for an enlarged replacement facility for UNMH. Tim Nelson and others are leading efforts to improve the efficient use of our OR’s and inpatient beds, but these efforts alone do not support unrestrained clinical growth. Ten pounds in a five pound bag is NOT a sustainable growth strategy.

Stay tuned.

JCR
General Surgery New Faculty 2013 (left to right)- Charles Bellows, Division Chief, and Dr. Nicholas Sutherland- Dr. Krista Turner was unable to attend.

Ophthalmology New Faculty 2013 (left to right)- Dr. Robert Avery, Dr. Rachel Davis, and Dr. Arup Das, Division Chief- Dr. Timothy Winter was unable to attend.

Otolaryngology New Faculty 2013 (left to right)- Dr. Bradley Pickett and Dr. Michael Spafford, Division Chief, Vice Chair

Plastic Surgery New Faculty 2013- Dr. Christopher Demas, Division Chief

Surgical Oncology New Faculty 2013 (left to right)- Dr. Anna Volturna, Dr. Ashwani Rajput, Division Chief, and Dr. Rodrigo Rodriguez- Dr. Bridget Fahy was unable to attend.

Urology New Faculty 2013 (left to right)- Dr. John Russell, Chair, and Dr. Julie Riley- Dr. Nicholas Boncher and Dr. Joseph Raffel were unable to attend.
The Surgery Department offers a limited number of competitive awards, "Surgery Research Investigator Awards" of up to $5,000 to support the research projects of the faculty. There will be two awards per cycle, and we will have three cycles per year. The deadline for the next cycle is February 10, 2014 (Start date: March 1, 2014). Please submit your application to Barbara Shortman, C/O SRIA Awards.

Graduating Chief Residents Congratulations!

- **Ali Ahmad, MD**
  Surgical Oncology Fellowship
  Roger Williams, Rhode Island

- **Erica McBride, MD**
  Vascular Fellowship
  Geisinger, Danville, PA

- **Andy Shay, MD**
  Trauma Critical Care Fellowship
  UNLV, Las Vegas, NV

- **Alex Zuriarrain, MD**
  Plastics Fellowship
  Cleveland Clinic, Miami, FL

Research Residents

- **David Hoang, MD- PGY3**
  Critical Care Fellowship
  Cedars Sinai, Los Angeles, CA

Residency Appointments

Welcome to UNM!

- **Barkat Ali, MD**
  (General Surgery)

- **Steve Cali, MD**
  (General Surgery)

- **Adeel Faizi, MD**
  (General Surgery)

- **Lindsay Jinkins, MD**
  (General Surgery)

- **Molly McClain, MD**
  (General Surgery)

- **Fatima Sadiq, MD**
  (General Surgery)

- **Lars Webb, MD**
  (General Surgery)

- **Nizhoni Denipah, MD**
  (ENT)

- **Noah Syme, MD**
  (ENT)

- **Jordan Brady, MD**
  (Urology)

- **Bevan Choate, MD**
  (Urology)
**Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery**

OR leadership conducted a Planning, Doing, Studying, Acting (PDSA) review of the Cardiothoracic Surgery OR scheduling process in September. Their findings for the study were as follows:

- The division of CT is very organized.
- The development and utilization of the OR board in the CT area was commended.
- The OR scheduling process was categorized as very good as it promotes good communication for staff, physicians, perfusionists and other departments (Cardiology, Pediatric Cardiology, etc.)
- This review process will insure all OR cases are booked correctly.

**Division of General Surgery**

Dr. Charles Bellows comes to UNM from Tulane University where he was chief of general surgery and vice Chair of research. Prior to Tulane he spent 5 years at Baylor in Houston, Texas where he was an associate professor of general surgery. His practice has concentrated in GI and obesity surgery and abdominal wall reconstruction. Dr. Bellows' current research is focused on the link between obesity and cancer as well as wound healing using paracrine factors from reprogrammed stem cells.

A native born New Yorker, Dr. Bellows grew up in Upstate New York. After graduating from University of Rhode Island, he completed graduate school at Harvard and medical school at the Medical College of Pennsylvania. He was fully trained in General Surgery at Tulane University in New Orleans. He is board certified in general surgery and a member of numerous professional societies such as, Southern Surgical. He is the state representative for ASMBS Bariatric access to care Committee, and has published almost 100 peer review publications and several book Chapters.

*Welcome aboard Dr. Bellows!*

Dr. Thomas Howdieshell, Dr. Krista Turner, Dr. Ming-Li Wang, and Dr. Nicholas Sutherland participated as speakers/trainers in the 2013 Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), for Surgical Intensive Care. The objective of this project is to impact learning and development, and to motivate students to pursue a career in health care. The participants consisted of a wide range of high school students who learned how to tie surgical knots and participated in Fundamentals of Laparoscopic Surgery (FLS) box training. Student participants were very excited and wore bracelets they made from tying surgical knots to express their gratitude!
**Division of Surgical Oncology**

Dr. Bridget Fahy was accepted into the Palliative Care Education and Practice course held on Nov 5-12, 2013. PCEP offers intensive learning experiences for physician and nurse educators who wish to become expert in the clinical practice and teaching of comprehensive, inter-disciplinary palliative care, as well as gain expertise in leading and managing improvements in palliative care education and practice at their own institutions.

Dr. Ashwani Rajput and Dr. Rodrigo Rodriguez will be presenting at the ASCO GI Cancer Symposium, Jan 16-18, 2014 in San Francisco; Abstract Title: Disparities in stage at presentation and treatment of colorectal cancer among Hispanic and non-Hispanic White patients.

Dr. Ashwani Rajput and Dr. Syed Faizi will be presenting at the Academic Surgical Congress Feb 4-6, 2014 in San Diego CA; Abstract Title: The Correlation Between Primary Tumor Size and Metastasis in Colorectal Cancer.

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**Division of Ophthalmology**

Dr. Arup Das was presented with the 2013 Regents’ Professorship Award on October 24, 2013 at the HSC Faculty Promotion & Tenure Reception. Congratulations!

Dr. Arup Das was announced as the Clinical and Translational Science Center (CTSC) Investigator of the Month in December, 2013. Dr. Das values the CTSC research concierge services for advisement on budgeting and logistics and uses the CTSC’s Clinical Research Unit for blood tests and physical exams for his clinical trials. Through his research, he hopes to find a cure for blindness caused by diabetes, age, and other diseases. Dr. Das’ current clinical research projects are in close collaboration with Dr. David Schade and other endocrinology colleagues on landmark clinical trials in diabetic retinopathy like DCCT (Diabetes Control and Complications Trial) and EDIC (Epidemiology of Diabetes Interventions and Complications), which are both NIH sponsored.

The expansion of the Optometry Clinic located on 1600 University Blvd. is currently underway; completion is anticipated in February, 2014. The clinic will provide full primary care for eyes.
The Division of Plastic Surgery would like to introduce Dr. Christopher Demas as the new Professor and Chief of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

Dr. Demas comes to UNM from Staten Island University Hospital where he was chief of plastic surgery. Prior to Staten Island he spent a decade at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Hanover, New Hampshire, where he was an associate professor of plastic surgery. His practice has concentrated in breast and facial reconstruction after cancer treatment, as well as body contouring and facial cosmetic surgery. Prior to joining Dartmouth-Hitchcock, he was chief of plastic surgery at the University of Arizona.

His primary interests are in aesthetic restoration of the human form due to the consequences of cancer, aging or trauma. Dr. Demas is an expert in microsurgical techniques, particularly for breast, head and neck and lower extremity reconstruction. Dr. Demas’ current clinical research is focused on novel approaches for prevention of surgical site infections.

A native born New Yorker, Dr. Demas grew up in Connecticut. After graduating from Princeton University with honors, he completed medical school at the University of Cincinnati in 1981. He was fully trained in General Surgery at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and completed plastic surgery training at Duke University as well as a hand fellowship at the University of Louisville. He is board certified in plastic surgery and a member of numerous professional societies such as, the American Society of Plastic Surgery and the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. Welcome Aboard Dr. Demas!

Baby News!

- Edward Auyang, MD
- Isaac Tawil, MD
- Ming-Li Wang, MD
- Evan Baldwin, MD
- Nathan Blecker, MD
- Lorant Divald, MD
- Richard Miskimins, MD
- Nancy Rivera, MD
- Lars Webb, MD

Congratulations on the new addition to your families!
Winter is here!

Photos by: Loretta J. Anaya