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Philadelphia Health Commissioner Domzalski emphasizes grass roots care, child health

By David Woods



John Domzalski, who succeeded Dr. Walter Tsou as Philadelphia's Health Commissioner earlier this year, wants to focus his

1,000 staff and \$170 million annual budget on community – even neighborhood – health issues, with particular emphasis on child care.

Following Mayor John F. Street's intent to clean up Philadelphia's neighborhoods through such initiatives as the blight removal and Operation Safe Streets programs, Domzalski wants to

Links between the Health Department and the local medical community need to be "clear, close and continuous."

bring health issues awareness and prevention to the grass roots level. Pointing to a city map showing immunization rates and the incidence of lead poisoning in each sector of the city, he says that his goal is to get immunization up to nationally prescribed levels, and annual testing for lead poisoning in every child up to the age of six.

In all of this, he says, teamwork is essential. Links between the Health Department and the local medical community need to be "clear, close and continuous," says the Commissioner. Physicians are an early warning system, he believes, and, especially since 9/11, represent the first line of defense for creating awareness of, say, cutaneous anthrax ... or for any of the 60 diseases that are reportable to the government by law. This is something Domzalski

calls "syndromic surveillance" – looking for a constellation of symptoms within the community.

Domzalski, who earned a law

City hires new medical director

City of Philadelphia has hired Dr. Joanne Godley as its new medical director. Pennsylvania law requires the city to have a medical director with a medical degree, unless the health commissioner is a physician.

Said Health Commissioner Domzalski: "[Dr. Godley] will guide the Department of public health in its development of medical policy and serve as its principal advisor on medical affairs."

degree at Temple and also holds a masters in public health from the University of Pittsburgh, has served the Department of Health in several positions including Deputy Health Commissioner for Public Health Services, Director of Correctional Health, Chief of Field Operations, and District Health Director. He is a Fellow of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, and, as a member of the City of Philadelphia Emergency Planning Group since 1996, was an early advocate of bioterrorism awareness.

Within the Health Department itself, Domzalski seeks to fuse the many different departments into a composite whole ... but at the same time favors decentralization, choosing to hold most of the staff meetings outside
Please see Health Commissioner on page 4

Monthly Luncheons

The PCMS Past Presidents Council continues its series of monthly luncheons open to all members and guests. Luncheons are held on the first Thursday of each month at 12 noon at PCMS headquarters.

The speaker on Thursday, September 5, 2002, will be **Maurie Pressman, MD**, Emeritus Chairman of Psychiatry, Albert Einstein Medical Center, Emeritus Clinical Professor of Psychiatry Temple Medical School and Author: *Visions from the Soul: Enter the Supermind*. His topic will be "Mind, Supermind and Superhealth."

The speaker on Thursday, October 3, 2002 will be **Paul J. Fink, MD**, Professor of Psychiatry, Temple University School of Medicine, Past President, American Psychiatric Association and Past President, The Philadelphia County Medical Society. His topic will be "Public Health in Private Practice."

Lunch and parking are free; parking entrance is from 21st Street. RSVP on 215-563-5343, Ext. 111 so we may provide enough lunches.

Classified Ads

Although *Philadelphia Medicine* no longer accepts classified ads we are pleased to announce that we accept ads for our Web site. Through the Internet you will reach a larger audience at a cheaper price.

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Russell Byers Charter School

The Russell Byers Charter School has extended its lease for rental of a portion of PCMS headquarters through June, 2003. The school experiences growth and success.

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editorial

Organized medicine—why bother?

By Samir Mehta, MD



In Philadelphia county, the payouts resulting from malpractice suits were greater last year than for the entire state of California, and the reserve savings of the largest insurer are greater than the GNP of some small countries.

It's where a physician traveling halfway across the country to practice medicine four days a week and returning on the weekends to spend time with his family is not absurd; where radio advertisements from the Bar Association state "we don't need better laws, we need better doctors"; where filing a malpractice suit has better odds of paying out than the Super 6 lottery; where physicians need to take out loans and a second mortgage to pay their medical liability insurance premiums; and where keeping a resident or young physician in the region to practice is harder than understanding the ICD-9 and CPT codes.

The AMA cites 12 states that are currently in a full-blown liability crisis: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia. Thirty other states are at risk of joining this list. Recently, our professional liability crisis led to the closure of the University Medical Center Trauma Center in Las Vegas, which serves not only the nearly two million inhabitants of Las Vegas, but is also the only level-one trauma center for the entire state of Nevada.

We've seen the effects of the liability crisis on our city and surrounding counties. It is not uncommon to hear that physicians have left, are in the process of leaving, or want to stay but cannot afford the medical liability insurance. Insurance carriers are refusing to cover physicians they have covered in the past, while some companies are refusing to take new customers in this region. The average award from mal-

practice suits is \$1 million.

At some point, the crisis will have a devastating effect on access to care and lead to irreparable consequences. And, at some point, your patients will be outraged by the lack of access to physicians and by the enormous costs associated with healthcare.

In the past, some physicians would cross the bridge and practice in New Jersey and Pennsylvania in an effort to reduce their medical liability insurance costs, but the malpractice coverage laws in New Jersey have recently changed and simply moving your practice into New Jersey is no longer a simple matter.

To many doctors, practicing medicine isn't fun anymore. We have a problem and we need to address it ... [by] becoming part of organized medicine.

If you are a resident or fellow or even a young physician and think that things are better elsewhere, they're really not. The climate needs to change. The public, the voting population, needs to be reminded about the plight of their physicians. The medical lobbyists need our support and our contributions. The American Bar Association requires lawyers to be members and pay dues to be a part of the Bar. The same does not hold true for the local, state, and national medical societies. It is obvious then that the ABA has significantly more ammunition, as do the insurance companies, than the 30,000 physicians in Pennsylvania.

To many doctors, practicing medicine isn't fun anymore. We have a problem and we need to address it and it starts with each one of us taking a few minutes out of our day and becoming part of organized medicine.

Dr. Mehta is a resident, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania; Chair, RFS-YPS, Philadelphia County Medical Society

Gubernatorial candidate Mike Fisher says he will be "physician-friendly"

Pennsylvania attorney general and Republican gubernatorial candidate Mike Fisher says he supports rights of physicians to negotiate jointly and would take aggressive action to bring more insurance companies into the Pennsylvania marketplace.

Speaking at a meeting sponsored by Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia County Medical Societies, Fisher addressed an audience of physicians and other interested parties and responded to questions.

He lamented that insurance companies had collected insurance premiums for years, then went out of business and in effect passed their liabilities on to others. He said it was clear that the trial lawyers would not support his candidacy. He is too physician-friendly. He predicted that a cap on pain and suffering in malpractice cases could not pass two legislative sessions and a public referendum.

He claimed credit as a major force in ensuring that tobacco funds allocated to Pennsylvania will be spent only on healthcare. He would consider shifting unfunded liability in the CAT Fund to a broader public base but believes all other efforts should be tried first.

In response to questions, he promised to study the constitutionality of the state mandating liability insurance for physicians and podiatrists but not for any other profession.

The County Medical Societies in Southeast Pennsylvania previously hosted a meeting with Democratic candidate for Governor, Ed Rendell. The medical societies have not yet endorsed either candidate.



Mike Fisher and Stephen L. Schwartz, MD, PCMS President

Excerpts from inaugural speech

"Stay true to our principles and don't quit," says PCMS President Dr. Stephen Schwartz

Stephen L. Schwartz, MD, was installed as the 141st President of The Philadelphia County Medical Society on Wednesday, June 26, 2002. Below is an extract of his installation speech:

"We, in medicine, are engaged in a protracted and extended struggle for the heart and soul of medical practice and the right to continue to do what is best for our patients. This struggle manifests itself in several ways:

- **Medical liability insurance** costs which threaten to price doctors out of medical practice and as a consequence damage significantly our patients access to high quality care.
- **Antitrust regulations**, never legislatively meant for learned professions, which permit insurers to monopolistically control patient populations, but render unlawful the congregating of three physicians to discuss payment for services.
- **Scope of practice**, whereby other professionals, untrained in medicine, demand to practice as if they were physicians (e.g., psychologists who wish to prescribe medications).

"This is a long battle which may well be unending. Victory will be slow and incremental and always fragile. However, we lose only when we walk away. If we stay true to our principles and don't quit; if we persevere, we, and our patients will succeed. This is the importance of organized medicine. This is the importance of membership. This is where numbers count. Thus, one of our goals this year is to increase the foundations of our membership. We have reached out and are reaching out to our medical students so that these future doctors get involved; we are also cultivating residents and fellows for whom the expense of membership is nominal so that these young physicians join us in this cause.

"However, our patients are not only individuals but are also populations. In this regard the Society will continue and strengthen our find relationship with the city's Department of Health. Together with Dr. Robinson

and Mr. Domzalski we will reach out to our fellow citizens. One example of this is our Block Captain Program, run so well by Dr. Herbert Kean, in which we host luncheon meetings for Block Captains. These individuals, the Block Captains, are people who represent their neighbors. At these luncheons we present speakers on a variety of health topics so that the Captains can carry this information back to their neighbors.

"We will also continue to engage with and monitor the City's preparedness for bioterrorism, with its threat to resurrect old microbes into new epidemics.

"In my interview for *Philadelphia Medicine*, I quoted two rabbis from the Pike Avot, a first century compendium of guidance. One was from Hillel who said: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? The other quote was from Rabbi Tarfon, who said, "It is not thy duty to complete the work, but neither art thou free to desist from it."

"Well, at this point, in order to conclude, let me tell you of a brief exchange. Dorothy Parker, the brilliant humorist, was also prone to recurrent severe depressions. After one of several suicide attempts, Robert Benchley, her colleague from the Algonquin Round Table, visited her in the hospital and said, 'Dottie, if you keep this up, you'll make yourself sick.' Not wanting that for any of us, I will now stop. Thank you."



Stephen L. Schwartz, MD, and his wife, Miriam, at the President's installation

pcms people



Shailendra S. Vaidya, MD, has been elected to the Governing Council of the AMA International Medical Graduate Section for a two-year term.



David J. Shulkin, MD, FACP, has been appointed as Drexel University College of Medicine's first Chief Quality Officer. He will also serve as the Chief Medical

Officer of the Medical College of Pennsylvania Hospital, a Tenet flagship hospital in the Philadelphia region.



Robert E. Booth, Jr., MD, Chief, Section of Orthopaedic Surgery at Pennsylvania Hospital and founder, Booth Bartolozzi Balderston Orthopaedics, was recently named president of The Knee Society, which represents approximately 100 of the US and Canada's most prominent knee arthroplasty surgeons, researchers and educators.



Pennsylvania Hospital has welcomed a team of world-renowned neurosurgeons

to its ranks. The team includes (*from left*) **M. Sean Grady, MD**, and **Peter D. Le Roux, MD**. The surgeons practice at the Penn Neurological Institute at Pennsylvania Hospital and provide a full-range of neurological services.

Want to attend the PMS annual meeting? Here's how

PCMS may need additional physician members to represent Philadelphia physicians and patients at the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Medical Society in Hershey, PA at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center on Saturday, October 19, and Sunday, October 20, 2002.

Expenses will be reimbursed. This is an opportunity to have a voice in setting medical society policy. All members, including young physicians, residents, international medical graduates, women and retired physicians are welcome. Call 215-563-5343, Ext. 101.

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Health Commissioner, *continued from page 1* in the community.

In a way, he said, we are part of organized medicine in this city. The Department employs 130 physicians, many of whom staff the City's eight community health centers. Physicians, says Domzalski, "occupy a special place in society; they're more than simply an instrument for supplying healthcare."

Asked what he'd like his legacy to be when he steps down from the Commissioner's role, Domzalski said it is to have brought public health to bear on neighborhood health issues and changed those disease indicators – such as infant mortality, immunization, aids – for the better. But in the final analysis, he believes, that system will continue to strive for those objectives no matter who is the Commissioner.

David Woods, PhD, is president of Healthcare Media International, Inc. Philadelphia (HMI3000@aol.com).

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