

Inaugural Message from MSNJ's 219th President, Niranjan (Bonki) Rao, MD

Delivered to the MSNJ House of Delegates, Saturday, May 14th in New Brunswick, NJ

It is historic to be standing here... in New Brunswick as the 219th president...Just a few yards from the site where this medical society was born in 1766. I would like to give my sincere thanks and gratitude for all those that have given me this unique honor...

This is a historic event and historic changes in health care looming. I thought it would be most appropriate to take you all through a brief journey from 1766 as the landscape of this Society was cultivated.

I will compare the issues, then and now, so that we may realize how our founding members tackled and resolved these complex problems. My hope is that this will give us a framework and more importantly, reassure our current approach in resolving these very similar problems given the challenges of 2011.

The first physician on record in New Jersey was Dr. Abraham Pierson who practiced in 1667. Many were physicians as well as priests. Many were self proclaimed doctors, as there were no medical schools here in the U.S. prior to 1765.

A Society is Born

A reporter in New York commented that few physicians are eminent, no regulation, and quacks abound. Subsequently, an ad appeared on June 27, 1766 in the New York Mercury, a newspaper at that time. Seventeen people responded to the ad, and showed up at Duff's Tavern in New Brunswick, at the corner of Albany and Peace Streets (the very location where the Hyatt Regency New Brunswick now sits)!

The Medical Society of New Jersey was thus conceived; the first professional organization in what would eventually become the United States of America and its purpose was for the "Advancement of profession and promotion of public good." It promoted honesty and integrity among patients and doctors. A table of fees and rates were approved. A burning issue and unresolved issue today! It is interesting to note that the Physicians fees that were set were justified for the following reasons. Being in this unique profession, physicians:

1. Deprive themselves of many comforts
2. Work... day and night
3. Are exposed to dangerous illnesses
4. Endure many painful years of studies and training

More importantly, every member was at liberty to 'abate' fees in the event of poverty. Gratis care for poor and indigent...was the norm.

Revolutionary War and Beyond

Dues were set for the functioning of the Society and meetings that were held focused mainly on discussion of scientific material and clinical cases. A general meeting was held once a year. From 1776 to 1781 there was no activity due to the Revolutionary War, and the Society reassembled in 1781.

In 1786, table of rates and fees were revisited for the second time!

Membership began to decline from 1791 to 1795 and the society went into a hiatus until 1807, when they met again here in New Brunswick at the Degraw Tavern on May 27th. Their solution was to expand and offer membership to non members. Physicians also began to be involved in the legislature to influence the profession.

The concept of district/county societies evolved as travelling became difficult due to non-existing bridges and roads. Somerset County was the first while the Union County was one of the last to organize. The society made a strong comeback in the next few decades, and other states followed suit with the formation of other state societies. Although the primary focus of these societies was clinical and educational, of note is the fact that the society was entrusted in issuing medical licenses between 1816 and 1902. The need for improvement of medical education nationwide saw the birth of the American Medical Association in 1847 and by 1885 there were 21 counties and 577 active members in MSNJ.

Post-Civil War

In 1866, the society began to resurrect, and the dues doubled from 0.50 cents to \$1.0.

When Dr. Henry Baldwin of Middlesex took over as the treasurer in 1866, the balance in the account was a mere \$3.75. A financial wizard, and with innovative ideas, he increased the balance to \$1000 dollars in an investment account, and a cash balance of \$316.16 by 1874.

In 1896 a new fee structure for the physicians was introduced for the third time. Approving an increase in charges from \$2 to \$ 5 based on the distance travelled, and visits between 9 pm and 7 am, allowed the doubling of charges

As travelling became easier in the 1880s and the 90s...meetings were held in various places such as Monmouth House in Spring Lake..

At the turn of the century in 1904, the first Journal of MSNJ was published. It detailed the transactions of the society and scientific material. A hundred years later, we communicate electronically and have the e-news, twitter and face book.

At the suggestion of Essex County to boost the membership, homeopaths were invited to join the society in 1909.

With the incidence of malpractice on the rise, MSNJ began offering medical defense at an additional cost, which was so strong and effective, that the cases virtually disappeared in the next few years. In today's terms, it would be known as an 'affidavit of merit'.

In 1908, MSNJ recommended to the legislature to appoint a 'commissioner of health'...a physician with at least 10 years of medical experience. Subsequently, with the efforts of MSNJ, the Board of Medical Examiners was established--- to separate the licensing from medical education.

Despite the pressures and the demands that existed for physicians, they found ways to have fun and entertainment collectively as a group... much like we've done for the past few years at our Annual Meeting.

In the 1920s, MSNJ took a strong stand for 'equitable payment' to physicians and hospitals. In 1924, as legislative and other matters needed urgent attention, and the president was not always readily available, the first CEO of MSNJ (an MD), was appointed...until then the books and the archives were stored by the president – treasurer.

MSNJ's efforts also led to the birth of Blue Cross –Blue Shield, a non-profit prepaid service plan in the 1930s. And as the threat of socialized medicine was looming with President Harry S. Truman proposing such a system, MSNJ opposed such mandatory insurance.

Post-World War II was a period of economic prosperity for the Society, and the membership grew. By 1965 the financial position was secure with a balance of over \$812,934.00

The Society prospered in the next three decades and I am confident that it will continue to do so.

Present Day

It is clear that in the past 245 years, physician issues have remained similar, and the approaches in resolving them have been identical- innovation, courage, honesty and leadership.

Just as the physicians and other citizens here in the US opposed the British tyranny and oppression more than 2 centuries ago, Mr. Mahatma Gandhi lead an entire nation, ruled by the same British on the other side of the globe, to independence in 1947.

He used a simple tactic...Exposing to the entire world the injustice and exploitation on the very same people that were the rightful owners of the land which the British had occupied for nearly 200 years.

Gandhi had the courage, intelligence, perseverance, and above all patience, to win this war, which took over 30 years.

I see a similar situation here in the United States, pertaining to health care and the doctors who provide the service. Injustice and exploitation of a highly skilled and trained professional.

So what is the solution???

No matter how many types of allied health care providers evolve, they all must be accountable to a physician- one way or the other.

The burden of this new health care delivery is **unjustly and unreasonably** being thrust upon the physicians. This has to change.

In order to successfully win this battle, we must have similar courage, unity, and above all, leadership. As a society, we must be prepared to present with factual evidence of unjust practices. I can assure you, as a commander of this army, I intend to do just this, of course with facts and information for which I will depend on you all.

MSNJ intends to launch various new, “out of the box” ideas to strengthen our organization, on the same lines that were shown and compared.

I ask you humbly that you keep an open mind to explore these mutually beneficial ideas, as we pave the way to new horizons. Communication being the key to success, and with information at your finger tips, please stay tuned to be part of this instant messaging in this electronic era- especially on action items. MSNJ is working with its corporate partners to make this a reality.

Fit Docs

Finally, physicians tend to neglect themselves in terms of their own health. I can tell you that I am one of the most non-compliant patients there is! I believe that we should “live by example” and we need to take care of our own matters of general health.

Therefore, I am glad to announce the launch of a state wide doc’s health initiative known as MSNJ’s “Fit Doc Challenge” whereby MSNJ will urge and work with each of the hospitals in the state to create a functional gym that is to be close to the doctors’ lounge, preferably with a trainer. The cost should be shared by the medical staff and the

hospitals. What better partnership can there be between these two health care providers? There will be periodic health screening including the basic A1-c, lipid profile and nutritional counseling.

St. Peters University Hospital is the first in the state to introduce this program next month, and MSNJ will provide the model. I hope that each of the counties and their medical staff will take a leadership role in executing this program in each of their hospitals. It is no longer a luxury, but a necessity.

It is my hope that we will make a difference in our lives and be an example to our patients and to the public.

Today, I lead by example in moving MSNJ's "Fit Doc Challenge" forward. I am committed to making a difference in MSNJ by making changes within myself.

I am encouraging you, the membership of MSNJ, to join me in leading healthier lifestyle to inspire our patients, better ourselves, and motivate our colleagues to do the same.

Currently, my BMI is 28. By the 2012 Annual Meeting, my goal is to lower it to 23. I encourage the membership to join me in taking the MSNJ Fit Doc Challenge.

Through the MSNJ website you will be able to track my progress of weight loss, regular exercise and diet. I do not anticipate that this will be an easy endeavor, but any worthwhile achievement never is.

It is time for us as a great physician organization to make a meaningful impact in many ways: **Let us be the change that we wish to see.**

Thank you all and god bless.