

Looking Ahead To The Bicentennial 2016

In the spirit of the bicentennial, I shall share with you my wish for the Essex County Medical Society. I have two wishes: to tell the two-hundred year history of great doctors and to continue their legacy in serving Essex County.

The physicians who migrated from Massachusettes Bay across the Passaic River to Newark and Elizabeth in the seventeenth century accompanied pioneers seeking freedom, opportunity and change. Read the stories of our founding members and learn the details of their lives. Learn what David Hume calls their national qualities, that is industry, knowledge and civility, and what Thomas Paine calls courage. This courage is still alive in us. Just this week we all faced the threat of a pandemic deadly flu. For the first time since 1918, patients and staff put on masks, schools closed and activities were curtailed. I looked into the eyes of my office staff and I saw fear as patients entered wearing masks; I saw anger as they grew in number; but I saw courage as the staff bravely entered those rooms.

The Essex County Medical Society has led America into the challenges posed by each era of American progress. It has been a pillar for patriotism and a standard of healthcare for everyone.

Now we had help. For fifty- five years, we had medicine with Art, and that is everything that the doctor ever needed. I'm still trying to get him to write that book. Honored by the AMA, and by the American College of Surgeons, Art Ellenberger's weapon was his pen. He cut a path of strong political strategy through the corridors of Trenton and paved his way with powerful speeches; and something tells me that Art's ink well is not dry yet.

This year, Dr. Rod Clement introduced the Essex County Medical Society to the Medical Society of New Jersey technology and staff. Our membership is already growing through the internet. Rod, we are grateful for being under the State Management, for being in the able hands of Executive Director Linda Mills, and for the modernization process. I shall always be eternally grateful to you for doing it under your shift.

Now, please indulge me with just few more pats-on-the back in the spirit of the bicentennial.

To paraphrase Governor Whitman in a speech about our prominent members, she said, "First in Essex County, First in New Jersey, First in America"; and here is to whom she was referring.

As a new champion, Dr. Anthony Caggiano wanted to stop, "drive through babies", and so Governor Whitman signed his bill from Essex County into law, The Newborns and Mothers Health Protection Act.

Dr. Seymour Charles, another prominent member, who put seatbelts into cars among other things, approached me and said, this has to be a national law. Seymour, myself and a few others worked with Senator Bradley and brought the bill to Washington so that President Clinton could sign it into law and share in Dr. Caggiano's dream.

As a new champion, Dr. Alan Lippman wanted to decrease lung cancer from cigarettes and so Governor Whitman signed his bill from Essex County into law. Dr. Lippman, like President Lincoln faced ethical challenges that went to the core of individual freedom. Fighting the tobacco companies, like fighting the insurance industry takes immense courage.

As a new champion, Dr. Mark Olesnicky sought to stop HIV transmission through a needle exchange program and so that bill from Essex County was signed into law. He also reformed the state medical society while president and I think that Bob Schiffer's quote on FDR applies to Mark. Bob said FDR knew where the people were at any moment on any issue and moved them forward at the right speed.

As a new champion, Dr. Rose Prystowsky wanted to stop mentally ill patients from being discharged prematurely from the hospital, and so that Essex County bill was signed into law. Dr. Rose Prystowsky was a pioneer in the field of Child Psychiatry. Dr. Milton Prystowsky started the first pediatrics residency Program, the Department of Pediatric Cardiology, and served as chairman of the Public Health Council. He has been a long time liaison to Washington fighting for child health reforms. The Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund of New Jersey was also his.

As a champion of change, the voice for women, children and the special needs population were many including: Dr. Arthur Marin, Dr. Peter Blumenthal, Dr. Anita Falla, and myself.

Dr. Marvin Wallen brought significant reforms to the County Medical Society, and continues to lead us in reaching out to the senior citizens. As a champion of change, he is counted among the voices calling for a coordinated disaster response and relief program. Through his tutelage, I have learned about the world of homeland security, the Office of Emergency Management, the state police, and the county government. Through Dr. Wallen I met another great friend of Essex County, our county health director, Dr. Mike Festa, my honored guest tonight. Because of these two gentlemen, Essex County Medical Society is now a health response arm of the Office of Emergency Management. Mike, I also want to welcome you as an honorary member of the society and as a distinguished advisor to the Board of Trustees.

Dr. George Hill, the ECMS historian, will record our legacy for posterity; and so George, I thank you in advance for this monumental task. According to historian, Gordon Wood, President Washington, was an extraordinary man who made it possible for ordinary men to rule. I feel strongly we are in extraordinary hands with Dr. Hill.

Politically, we will have a coordinated state and national plan to deal with the President's health care reform. Make no mistake, this medical society will fight any reduction in healthcare benefits to seniors and any lowering of fees to their doctors. The same goes for Medicaid. The problem, I fear is much worse than cutting fees on existing Medicaid/Medicare patients. President Obama has made this fall his goal for offering an

alternative government health insurance plan which would compete with private plans. Milton Freedman reminds us that, “government can never duplicate the variety and diversity of individual action.” Essex County is a very complex interconnected healthcare system stressed to the limit with economic decline and hospital closures. As Milton Freedman says, “government’s role should be to umpire the game and not to make the rules of the game.” Now we all know that any government plan is going to be like either Medicaid or Medicare. And we also know that we cannot afford to run our office or hospital without private insurance money. A group of us representing parts of the health care community will visit Representatives Pallone and Andrews, the authors of President Obama’s new healthcare plan.

Now onto local politics:

ECMS is the dominant voice, setting the standard of excellence in health care in Essex County. We will work with Senator Rice and his team on an advisory committee put together by this body and with a large voice from this body. This way, we can help to correct problems in delivering medical services in the county.

The last two areas are committee items.

First, we need to continue to coordinate with Dr. Mike Festa as a part of the health response team to disasters.

Thanks to Dr. Di Gregorio, we have a new committee to help our members appeal insurance company denials.

Next, we need to build on the ongoing efforts to prepare for the bicentennial in 2016. Here, I will work closely with our history committee.

The film project is still in progress and at some point the raw footage will need to be organized for one of three projects: Political campaigns; educational public relations for ECMS; and eventually a documentary. Of course every one participating in the filming can have a DVD of their part of the filming; and all the raw footage will be available to Dr. Hill for use in his writing of our history.

I look forward this year to working with an outstanding Executive Committee and Board, and with our new Executive Director Ms. Linda Mills, who hit the ground running and hasn’t stopped. I want to also thank the committee chairs and all of those who worked on the committees in the past and thank you in the future for your continued effort. Here I’m sure to call on Dr. Coblenz as program chair who had rave reviews from our nurses and teachers. We have a strong Executive Committee: Dr. Fletcher, Dr. Viscuso and Dr. Brand will be sharing the leadership. Dr. Giobee is the best political strategist and consensus builder since LBJ; Dr. Lind is the Harry Truman of medicine; Dr. Ghali keeps us honest and in good humor.

As we approach the bicentennial, think of those who have lost their job and house in this depression; think of those who have lost family members in the war against terror; and think of those who faced death in the current pandemic flu.

As I said earlier, we need to tell the stories of these great doctors; but we also need to continue their legacy in serving the people of Essex County. If we faced a new way of creating jobs, would we be industrious; if we faced a new challenge to governing, would we be civil; and if we faced pandemic disease and global warming, would we turn to science. These doctors were patriots and helped in the war effort of The American Revolution. Thomas Paine, our neighbor in Philadelphia, reminds us that they were also courageous. Realize the resiliency and strength in our people and the commitment in our leaders to pull us together as a county. The New York Yankees transferred some of the dirt and grass from the old stadium to the new one this year. And so, like the Yankees we may play in a new stadium, but it is still the, “house that Ruth built”.