

Wisdom At A Price

I'm sitting here with two hundred years of personal notes written by members of my society, many of whom began their practice of medicine prior to the American Revolution, some fighting under General Washington and General Grant, and one who wrote a eulogy for President Lincoln. The price of their knowledge was the foundation for the American Medical System. The hospital system they developed to care for wounded soldiers was used to provide care for urban expansion with the industrialization of cities. The lessons they learned from fighting yellow fever in the swamps and cholera on ships led to the era of vaccination, clean water and milk, anesthesia at surgery, and a resolve to strengthen the poor, the widow and the orphaned. They provided care during economic depressions and they used science to better health outcomes. So what do I add to their notes as the "Price of Wisdom", in 2009.

President Obama is initiating steps to make healthcare affordable as part of an economic recovery package. This he will achieve. The economy, in time, will recover. My patients will return to work and regain their pensions. But at what cost will healthcare continue to suffer now under the few surviving insurance companies that will control both private policies and the new public insurance option. I don't share the President's vision of restoring competition to the health insurance industry. To the contrary, I envision companies using the low cost option to further underfund hospitals, and decrease ambulatory care services. The growing state deficit would preclude state aid for county public health services.

My notes end here, for now, with a call out to our community leaders in business and politics to work with the community of healthcare professionals and develop an operational plan.

Barry Prystowsky, MD, President
Essex County Medical Society