

**FLORIDA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING 2008  
ROSEN SHINGLE CREEK RESORT, ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

Suddenly it was time again for the Annual Meeting of the FMA which has been moved from September to May to June to Labor Day and now the middle of summer, and I predict it will be moved again to accommodate the physicians while still considering the Legislative committee meetings and annual session of the Legislature. I just go with the flow on this, and the venue will remain large hotels alternating in Miami or Orlando to be most convenient for the largest number of delegates, in other words, never in North Florida.

When we awakened on that Thursday morning in Panama City, it was pouring rain and the radar showed a huge mass of echoes over North Florida moving the way we were trying to go. Jan, always the nervous flyer, rebelled and reluctantly I loaded the car for the long trip south although we could have gone and gone safely, it would likely have been bumpy which she abhors. I like to think the price of aviation fuel is not playing a role in this, but I am still smarting from the \$7.31 per gallon price for Jet-A in Trenton, New Jersey, during a trip to Princeton for a wedding, but I still think that Cheyenne N49AC is the most wonderful way to travel and the price is not too bad for four people seeing as we had breakfast there and lunch in Panama City.

Spotty rain was the order of the day through most of the trip, although we never hit anything really bad and specifically no lightning was seen which correlates to turbulence on my Stormscope in the airplane. We headed up Highway US 231 following the busy Bay Line Railroad north up to State Highway 20, turning right at the old Pine Tree Bar where Marianna used to buy whiskey and now a BP Station, and thence east toward Tallahassee by way of Clarksville, the beautiful pristine Chipola River, Blountstown, the Apalachicola River (in its greatly diminished form thanks to Atlanta), Bristol, and then Hosford. The Ochlocknee River with its dam and spillway at Lake Talquin is a landmark pleasant to see each time, but then we shifted to the south to Wakulla, Newport, and the rejoining of Highway US 98 with the long straight stretch so beloved by the Florida Highway Patrol to Perry. We had repast at a barbeque place in Perry which was slow but delicious and observed the local flora and fauna eating there, obviously the most popular restaurant in that City. Refueled in body and gasoline we then aimed south on Highway 17 and finally figured out for the first time how to use the navigation GPS system in the Infiniti M45 which disappointed me with mileage of 24.2 for the trip- my old Q45 got 26.2 even though larger with a bigger engine. Chiefland brought the left turn toward Ocala to join Interstate 75 and the toll Sunshine Parkway to Orlando toward the grand total of six short hours on the fanny, only a presage of things to come.

The Rosen Shingle Creek Resort is near Universal Studios and is less than two years old. It is an imposing establishment, towering above the landscape and seemingly going on forever, especially when measured on foot. Check-in was appropriately easy and the luggage showed up quickly to our room on the sixth floor, while I parked in the self-park area at \$8 a day. I walked up the length of the convention center which made you want a Segway, turned up another imposing quarter mile long hall, and thence to the lobby for the elevator. It has multiple wings and is just enormous, and I have stayed in some large hotels, but this was BIG. The room was nice and then only complaint is that I did not have an ethernet port on my 9 year old laptop to get on line, having bought a PCMIA wireless network card for use in the last hotel a year ago. Supper the night of arrival was quiet in the Osceola Cafe downstairs at the Hotel and we turned in early in preparation for the early day on Friday.

I awakened at 5:30 AM for the early morning caucus of all the Medical Societies in North Florida which was scheduled to meet at 6:30 AM in the farthest distant room in the convention center, but the delegates trickled in fairly much on time. Our delegation was in a bit of disarray and Bays

Medical Society was the host Society, so I suddenly was catapulted from delegate from the American College of Cardiology to the chairmanship of our meeting. We had a healthy contingent from Escambia and Capital including Bob Brooks with FSU, Alma Littles with FSU, Gary Winchester with the Board of Medicine, and Mike Redmond from Pensacola. We had our own redoubtable Neal Dunn, Debra Williams, Jason Newsom, Jon Ward, and Kamel Elzawahry each of whom had busy agendas, but also attended. Our Northwest Florida caucus was mirrored in other caucuses from around the State which are manageable groups of doctors who will discuss the issues before the FMA and help formulate opinions about resolutions and discuss each one for merits, pros, and cons. These opinions were taken to the Reference Committees which met Friday morning, and they listen to testimony for and against each resolution. These are then reworded, combined, and restated with an opinion as to being for or against by the Reference Committee which then are presented to the entire House of Delegates for approval or rejection. This is truly democracy in action and while we must be cognizant of our local priorities, exposure to all the others helps each of us become better physicians and better advocates for our profession and patients.

I note we are losing our Executive Director of Bays Medical Society as Janice moves on to another occupation in another State and we wish her well, but Bays is taking a dramatic step in bringing the FMA closer together by having the FMA hire and pay our next Exec which will make the County Medical Society and Exec more loyal and more participatory with the FMA, bonding us together in a manner which is an example to others in our Association.

You should know that issues dominating included ER call, sovereign immunity, payment for call, expansion of scope of practice by others, Medicaid faults, and those seeking FMA endorsement for a multitude of activities. I note Medicaid has not paid for a month as EDS got the new computer contract and despite having 18 months to get ready, failed to do so. I think that EDS should be fined for that with the monies paid to the physicians, but it seems that our State managers let us down once again and the only ones who suffer are the physicians and patients- perhaps we can have a penalty in the next contract. Likewise Medicare has not paid for a month as CMS was geared up to cut physician pay 10% which was cancelled at the last minute by Congress, then vetoed by Bush, then overridden in a dramatic game of chicken two weeks after the deadline. Bush had delayed implementation so now they had to redo the software once again and who suffers but the poor physicians once again while the government gets to delay payment, something they specialize in.

The Good Government Luncheon is a yearly affair, and this year it was once again well attended. Our FMA Political Action Committee is very active and very successful as subsequent events bore out. The main speaker was our own Senator Don Gaetz who started off with a description of what a terrible job the FMA had done the year before, losing even one simple bill giving the Pharmacists the right to give vaccines and no real accomplishments. This year, however, he recounted how the FMA started with a Managed Care Reform Bill which rallied all the lobbyists from insurance to attorneys against us. The fate of a bill depends on how many Committees it is assigned to be examined in, and ours was going to four Committees where any more than two Committees is the kiss of death. Thanks to the tireless work of Don Gaetz and in spite of a fifth Committee added late, the FMA prevailed and it was signed into law. This bill changed the time managed care entities had to reexamine a clean claim from 30 months to 12 months, stopped the entities from sending the check to patients in network, and stopped the practice of moving physicians from PPO to PPO without their knowledge and approval. We prevailed in spite of horrendous odds and gained many admirers and supporters for the future. Apparently Jeff Atwater is the man to support for the new President of the Senate and we held a gathering for him at the FMA which rounded up over a hundred thousand dollars that day.

I talked with Dr. Bob Brooks who is the Associate Dean at FSU School of Medicine and their new Dean is coming next month from Vermont. Bob was fresh from a Master of Public Health from Harvard and appreciated the diverse views of up East married to the extensive data base required to survive that course of study. Prior to that he had a degree in Public Health and was an Infectious Disease physician in private practice, one of the best subspecialties in terms of intellect and respect from fellow physicians. Bob is a uniquely talented physician and I assure you that you will hear more of him in the future.

The House of Delegates opened at 3:00 PM Friday with the usual Pledge of Allegiance and presentation of the colors, and a cute blonde sang a very good “Star Spangled Banner” which has been butchered in the past. A Hindu female physician (with a male backup) sang the invocation in Hindu, then lapsed into a pretty standard prayer to God which we all could agree with- unusual and effective. The first House is taken up with protocol, presentations, and awards, things which have to be done and are an important part of the FMA, but to some it is boring. It is a lot shorter than it used to be and I noted that the important Certificates are a lot larger and made of brass instead of the paper certificate I received in the past. We addressed uncontested elections of which there were many, and Dr. Jim Dolan, an orthopedist from Islamorada, will be our new President Elect while the capable cardiologist, Dr. Steve West from Fort Myers, is our new President. Steve has a set of quadruplets with the great story of when they turned 16 he bought them one Ford Expedition. They wrecked it within four hours.

There was a brief reception for the President and then Northwest Florida all came together for a supper which added up to about 50 people traveling in various taxis and limousines to a Ming something Chinese restaurant. We had a lazy Susan in the middle of our table of twelve people rotating the food around with (Chinese) family style price-fixed meal of interesting items, not really my cup of tea if you pardon the pun. But we had a good time with Tallahassee Orthopedist Andy Borom leading the charge espousing the MD 1000 Club and he milked our table of \$2,500 before the night was over with \$4,000 total from the room and it takes that kind of chutzpah to make this work and he had it in spades. In the MD 1000 Club you agree to give \$1000 to whomever the FMA PAC directs you to give it to, be it the People For Better Florida (our unrestricted “cause” fund) or a politician anywhere in the State who needs financial help. When an extra \$150,000 or so pours into a closely contested campaign from doctors all over the State, it gets everyone’s attention and is very effective in terms of building friendships and getting your way in the legislature. Dr. Borom has 15 different breeds of chickens.

The buzzer rang in the dark once again and I was walking to our early morning caucus when I spotted a “working girl” traversing the lobby to go home- that is how early we were up and about. We had a quorum at 6:30 AM and proceeded through the last set of resolutions, then reviewed the two reference committee reports which would be presented that day, the FMA staff having stayed up half the night typing these tomes. The officers of our Association including the incoming President, cardiologist Steve West, came by and spoke to our group briefly. We then adjourned to the 8:00 AM House of Delegates meeting once again for some introductions prior to settling down to the reports of the Reference Committees. Here the group was a bit restive and some of the people got lost in the maze of recommendations, amendments, tertiary amendments, points of order, and referrals to the Board. And as usual there were clumsy attempts at wordsmithing from the floor, long arguments on those things we all agree upon, and pointless battles to no avail. This year we had for the first time electronic voting which we had borrowed from the Texas Medical Association where each delegate had a wireless voting device. You could vote on each topic multiple times and it would tally only the last vote, and we got to try it on “Who is the Governor of Florida?” as the test question which Crist won by 80% to 20% for Altenburger, thanks to the jokesters in the group. More interesting was the

Presidential choice which came down in the biased group as 70% McCain and 30% Obama. Thus armed with experience we proceeded to vote in earnest, but the first close vote (one vote different out of 230 cast) brought howls of displeasure and an attempt at revoting which failed by a large margin, recalling the heady days of the 2000 elections in this same State. The most important thing we voted upon was to endorse removal of the duty of call from Hospital privileges, but it was overwhelmingly passed, reflecting the massive game of “chicken” that the government is playing with our profession over care for the indigents and reimbursement. I think they miscalculated how much indigent care that we were doing, and now the system is unraveling as the pay cuts to overstretched physicians is reaching the breaking point and we need more than a pat on the back for the taking of call.

You should know that the FMA had a bloodletting a year ago after the unsuccessful legislative season which resulted in a 13% decline in membership over two years, the departure of our Exec, Sandy Mortham, and a drop in finances. They hired a consultant group to reassess our association, have completely changed the FMA relationship with the Political Action Committee, hired Kimberly Scott as temporary Executive Director, and the General Counsel, John Knight, left the Association with Jeff Scott assuming the helm of that office. We have had a ten percent increase of membership since that time and the finances are well in hand with huge reserves which are growing. I have participated in several of these reshaping programs and this was like the previous McManis report in 1992 and is still ongoing.

There was a brief installation ceremony after the House of Delegates where Steve West was installed as President and Mrs. Andrews of Orange County was installed as the President of the Alliance. Steve gave a good talk which was appropriately brief with one point being that in disasters they call for physicians to come help- not hospital administrators or insurance executives. They would just get in the way. He outlined some of his ideas building on those of Dr. Altenburger with a Practice Management Center.

Sunday morning was once again our early morning caucus as we polished off the last reference committee reports. Jan and I left early after that for the six hour drive back to Panama City as I had to fly to Gulfport, Mississippi, that afternoon with kinfolk. Those attending the session heard Dr. Ron Davis, the immediate Past President of the AMA, give a talk about his pancreatic cancer which was diagnosed shortly after his election which was quite poignant and I have read the speech. The limited the athletic participation physicals to MDs and DOs with their PAs and ARNPs, and I note Tallahassee stopped doing these four years ago as the medical home concept was more important with counseling about sex, weight, and risk taking which is not done at the Civic Center. Dr. Ward headed the fight against tanning beds and we will seek a poster in each salon about melanoma risk. The best was Dr. Newsom who eschewed the dinner-dance of Saturday night to visit 15 fast food establishments to assess their calories and postings. He used that to argue for a resolution requiring posting of this information which gained him an ovation from the floor.

The trip back was uneventful and a little faster on the Interstate system, rocketing along at 80 mph most of the time while watching for the troopers in the perpetual game. At the Board meeting after the session ended, the Board of Governors unanimously elected Mr. Tim Stapleton, the former FLAMPAC Director, as the new Executive Director of the FMA. Tim previous to the FMA worked for the AMA and will be just wonderful. Dr. Steve West has already sent his first communiqué by Email to the stalwarts of the FMA and we should have a great year ahead for the house of medicine.

James T. Cook, III, M.D.