



Randy L. Flink, Principal ❖ Christopher M. Gregory, Principal  
Robert I. Kramer, M.D., Medical Advisor

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In our previous *DocOnomics*, we turned the podium over to Dr. Ryan Ford, a practicing physician in a rural Texas community. Dr. Ford's words resonated with many of you. In this commentary, we pass the torch to our own Dr. Bob Kramer, who retired from active practice years ago but still commands an important audience within the professional medical community and among his former primary care patients.

## ***TERRIBLY OUT OF PRACTICE***

An important cornerstone of a free and prosperous society is to be able to practice what we preach, regardless of profession. It should come as no surprise that practitioners of medicine in this great country of ours increasingly are unable to fulfill their central mission of delivering high-quality medicine at a price that enables both care provider and patient to pay their bills.

It made me sad when I read Dr. Ryan Ford's job description and life in a rural Texas community, especially so when one can sense the passion and commitment he brings to his life's work. However, Dr. Ford is not the only one suffering the financial pitfalls facing all of us in primary care, and most of us in specialty practice. How often do I hear of a colleague who has practiced for years, and when the time finally comes for him or her to slow down, decreasing reimbursements and increasing costs of doing business have made slowing down virtually impossible.

Just as important, if not even more so, is the reality that dwindling income can adversely affect retirement planning, asset protection and wealth accumulation. The vagaries of today's stock market, combined with our ever-increasing national debt and weakening Dollar vis-a-vis the currencies of Asia, Europe and Canada all portend of even greater threats to financial security.

Particularly disturbing to me were certain statements made by Dr. Ford: *"...financially, if I had to do it all over again, I would have paid back the money I owed and practiced elsewhere. But here's the conflict: I wouldn't take a million dollars to give up the experience of serving my community."* How sad that this doctor has to be so conflicted. As he states *"...we weren't trained to be business people, we were trained to be physicians."*

Prophetically, in June of this year I will celebrate my 50<sup>th</sup> medical school reunion. Looking back, only the last 15 years or so have caused me significant angst about my profession. There was no one who loved practicing medicine more than I did, but in the late 80's and early 90's, a whole new lexicon for healthcare surfaced: providers, covered lives, population-based health, managed care, TPAs, discounts, withholds, HMOs, PPOs, PHAs, NCQA, etc.

Healthcare delivery has morphed from the time honored, treasured physician as a friend and healer, to a system that rewarded not who could do it better, but who could do it cheaper. What an awful state. The insurance industry must be relieved of the leadership role in health care delivery.

Medicine should be practiced by physicians plying their skills, knowledge, education and experience on patients who recognize the expertise we bring to the table. I am not sure that the delivery of healthcare should be in the hands of investor-owned, bottom line sensitive and Wall Street driven businesses.

We have the opportunity to effect change so that young physicians can anticipate a rewarding and financially secure future, and senior physicians can slow down, mentor younger colleagues and not

have to change careers because of financial insecurity. How long we shall remain on this slippery slope remains moot, but one thing that is incumbent on all of us is to make certain that as long as Wall Street has the upper hand in our compensation, we must seek the very best financial and legal counsel to maximize whatever wealth we can muster and protect it from those seeking to confiscate it.

If you want to voice your opinion or share a concern, send me an email via the link at the bottom. It will be sent to me.

This is not a time for physicians to remain silent.

Robert Kramer, MD