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From the Editor's Desk: Physician Integrity

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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From the Editor's Desk



PHYSICIAN INTEGRITY

Dear Lord, what is to become of us physicians in these rapidly changing times? You have called us to this noble profession, have graced us with talents, compassion and intellect to care for Your people. And yet, we find increasing obstacles to doing what you have called us to do. We find ourselves being placed in a position where we are unable to exercise our professional judgment; we have medical directors of health plans using methods of compromising care by fiscal restraints. The bottom line seems to be not quality medical care, but money. Our physicians are being placed in untenable positions of not ordering tests because they will deprive themselves of income under certain plans.

Instead, by doing what is best for their patients, they must not order certain tests or procedures because it may jeopardize the physical integrity of the plan. The harassment of plans to get patients out of the hospital early is most onerous. The phone calls from plans allowing you only a few days more to get patients back on their feet are most distressing to us. The intense fiscal competition between various plans run by businessmen and physicians-turned-businessmen seems to be dominated by money instead of quality medical care.

Dear Lord, what effect is this competition having upon the integrity of our physicians? We who are committed to the best interests of our patients find ourselves forced to compromise our best medical judgments through coercion, threats and fiscal ostracism. Unfortunately, my dear Lord, I find many physicians insecure and too apprehensive to stand up against these modern fiscal forces. They feel helpless and are too willing to compromise. Their personal and professional integrity is being eroded

because they are being enslaved to a system based upon cost containment and fiscal restraint. They are opening themselves to malpractice suits for shoddy medical care which has been foisted upon them and their patients.

When a physician has to base his decisions upon fiscal considerations rather than what is best for the patient, he has placed himself in an untenable position and must face the consequences in his heart, mind and soul. His conscience has been violated and leaves in its wake guilt, lack of self-esteem and sorrow.

Dear Lord, raise up among us voices of protest against these forces in society. Enlighten the business, industrial, insurance, governmental executives to be more compassionate, more humane and caring for the society of which they are privileged to be a part. Place in their hearts Your love and concern for the least of our brothers. Have them reorder their priorities, their power and money to help the sick, the suffering and the poor, so that those persons will have the wherewithal to realize their human dignity as people formed in Your image and likeness.

The modern trend in medicine today is so opposed to this vision that I am getting depressed. However, You give me hope when You recall to my mind how You have been with the medical profession throughout the ages. The love, the compassion, the skills, the devotion to the health of the individual patient have always been medicine's primary concern. Our ancestors, dating back to Hippocrates, have passed the torch through succeeding generations, cultures and civilizations to us today. The medical professional ethic of which we are the modern possessors, will be passed on to succeeding generations of physicians.

At times, the torch is buffeted, as it is now, but will survive if we are but true to You, seek Your help and nourish it in our daily lives with patients, colleagues and society.

Dear Lord, give me and my physician friends the courage and integrity to remain true to the ideals You put into us when You called us to share in Your ministry as the Divine Physician.
