



# The Galveston County Physician Newsletter



Galveston County Medical Society Newsletter - Winter 2009

## GCMS Officers installed Jan. 16

Make plans to attend the 2009 Galveston County Medical Society Installation of Officers on Friday, Jan. 16, 6:00 p.m. at Gaido's Seafood Restaurant, 3802 Seawall Boulevard, Galveston.

Please join us for the Installation of Dr. Thomas Kimbrough, President; Dr. Daniel Piazza, President Elect; Dr. Barbara Thompson, Vice President, and Dr. Mary Godinich, Secretary/Treasurer.

Dr. William H. Fleming III, President Elect of the Texas Medical Association, will provide the keynote address. For reservations, please call the GCMS office, **409-935-3000**.

## Have your voice heard: Join *First Tuesdays at the Capitol*

Want your voice heard by your state legislators? Participate in one of the Texas Medical Association's (TMA) *First Tuesdays at the Capitol*. Make plans now to spend a day in Austin on any one or all of these days on Feb. 3, March 3, April 7, and May 5, to join us for briefings with your local elected officials on the issues that mean the most to you.

Galveston County Medical Society and TMA will do all the work. We will make the appointments as well as give you briefing papers and key insights on the officials you will be meeting.

FIRST TUESDAYS *continued on page 4*

## Deadline approaching: TMA's Ike Relief Fund

The deadline for the Texas Medical Association's (TMA) Hurricane Ike Disaster Relief Fund is approaching for physicians who need help rebuilding their medical practices because of Ike. The Physicians Benevolent Fund of TMA is accepting applications for assistance until Jan. 5.

"The program's purpose is to reestablish the delivery of medical care to the hardest-hit areas of Texas by providing physicians in need with financial assistance," said TMA House Speaker Dr. Stephen L. Brotherton, chair of the Disaster Relief Fund. "Grants are available if

DEADLINE APPROACHING *continued on page 3*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**Thomas Kimbrough, MD  
PRESIDENT**

It is an honor and privilege for me to serve as president of the Galveston County Medical Society for 2009. I will assume the position from Dr. Kiran Shah who has been an excellent leader this year. Things were running smoothly until Hurricane Ike entered the picture. Dr. Shah stepped up to the plate, stayed on top of things and helped wherever possible. We appreciate his service, particularly during such a difficult year. On behalf of the membership, thank you, Dr. Shah.

As a member of the faculty, I begin the year with the challenges faced by UTMB. The layoffs of faculty and staff have been particularly difficult. Hospitals in every contingent county are feeling the repercussions of the downsizing of UTMB and the services it has provided. Many organizations, including GCMS, and Galveston's United Board of Health County Health District, have passed resolutions in support of UTMB. We hope our message will resonate with The UT Board of Regents, the Texas Legislature and other agencies empowered to restore UTMB to its former capacity.

The Texas Legislature will convene in January for the 81st Session. Since the last session, the Texas Medical Association (TMA) has been very involved in the interim hearings in preparation for the 2009 session. Issues under study range from health insurance reform (health plan transparency

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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and efficiency), the uninsured, Medicaid, and the physician workforce, to name a few. The trial lawyers will once again make every effort to overturn Proposition 12 which limits non-economic damages in medical liability awards. Our TMA legislative affairs department under the direction of Darren Whitehurst works around the clock during the session to protect and preserve physicians' issues and those of our patients.

There are two things we can do in support of our legislative agenda – participate in First Tuesdays at the Capitol campaign and join the TMA Political Action Committee (TexPac). Every first Tuesday during the session – Feb. 3, March 3, April 7, and May 5 – hundreds of physicians from around the state will walk the halls of the capitol in their white coats and visit with our legislators. If you wish to participate, call the GCMS office, **409-935-3000**, and we will be happy to coordinate your visit with TMA. If you have not joined TexPac, it's not too late to get involved. TexPac is bipartisan united voice for medicine's legislative agenda. You may join on your TMA/GCMS dues statement (\$125) or go to their Web site, **www.texpac.org**.

Cornea and External Disease Specialist in an office sharing arrangement with a glaucoma/retina specialist is looking for an ophthalmologist to take over the practice. Very personable and experienced optometrist on site. Growth potential and referral sources are extraordinary. Glaucoma/retina specialist is practicing medical ophthalmology and is an excellent referral source for surgical cases. 713-446-1447.

### FPs, IMs & PEDIs NEEDED ASAP!

Locum Tenens Staffing Services & Employment Oppty's Available! Great Rates w/ Paid Malpractice!  
PRI PHYSICIAN RESOURCES, INC.  
Call PRI today at 713-522-5355 or 1-800-522-7707 or "Apply Online" at [www.physicianresources.com](http://www.physicianresources.com)!

Practice Opportunity - Internal Medicine, Family Practice or Ob/Gyn to join Willow Wellness Center in Tyler as independent contractor. Excellent potential earnings and insurance coverage. Please call Angela Chambers, MD, 903-596-0497 during business hours or 903-561-6446 after 7 p.m. and/or weekends.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Galveston County Medical Society

**Fri., Jan. 16, 2009, 6 p.m.** – 2009 Installation of Officers, Gaido's Seafood Restaurant. For reservations, call **409-935-3000**

### Texas Medical Association

**Jan. 30-31, 2009**, TMA Winter Conference, Austin (no Delegation)

**Thanks to Mainland Medical Center and UTMB for their support of GCMS meetings.**

## Help fix our health care system: Five things you can do

Today's health care system is broken. Unfortunately, you cannot fix it or protect your practice by working more hours and taking care of more patients. The only way for you to effect "real change" is through the legislative process. Here are five easy things you can do for your practice starting today — right at your desk.

1. **Sign up for TMA Legislative News Hotline.** Keep track of medicine's top priority issues throughout the session by subscribing to the daily or weekly e-newsletter.
2. **Use TMA's Grassroots Action Center.** Write, e-mail, or call your legislator when critical issues arise. TMA makes it easy. All you have to do is respond to a TMA Action Alert using the message provided. It only takes a minute.
3. **Get to Know Your Legislators.** When medicine speaks, legislators do listen, especially if they've heard from you before. Work through your county medical society to set up a local physician meeting with your state representative or state senator. Very often, you or your colleagues know them personally. There is no substitute for this personal relationship!
4. **Sign up for First Tuesdays at the Capitol.** Join hundreds of your colleagues in Austin the first Tuesday of the month (Feb. 3, March 3, April 7, May 5). Legislators take note when doctors in white coats walk the halls of the capitol each session.
5. **Join TEXPAC.** A small contribution to TMA's political action committee can make a huge difference.

For more information and to sign up for these activities, go to TMA's Web site at **www.texmed.org**, click on Governmental Affairs on the left, then scroll down to Get Involved, or call TMA's Knowledge Center at **800-880-7955** or e-mail **louise\_geerts@hcms.org** or call **409-935-3000**.

*Source: TMA*

## DEADLINE APPROACHING

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your practice incurred uninsured or nonreimbursable property damage and you do not have adequate funding to cover the damage."

You may complete the applications on the TMA Web site, [www.texmed.org](http://www.texmed.org), or download the form, complete it and mail it back. Completed applications will be evaluated monthly but must be received by Jan. 5, 2009, to be considered for assistance. Physicians who practice in a Hurricane Ike federally designated disaster area are eligible to apply. Additional guidelines and a timetable for evaluating applications and awarding grants also are on the TMA Web site.

The program is nearing its \$1 million goal. A generous \$500,000 donation from the Physicians' Foundation has been bolstered by additional contributions from UnitedHealthcare, Aetna, the Texas Medical Liability Trust, the TMA Insurance Trust, Humana, the American Medical Association, the Okefenokee County Medical Society (Georgia), the Williamson County Medical Alliance, and the Louisiana State Medical Society. Aetna is the latest to make a contribution, donating \$15,000.

The TMA Foundation continues to accept donations online through the Web site, <https://www.texmed.org/Forms/TMAFoundation/Donation/Default.aspx>.

"We intend to use every single penny we raise to help our fellow physicians begin seeing patients again," Dr. Brotherton said.

If you have questions or need help completing the application, call Gail Schatte at TMA, **800-880-1300, ext. 1600**.

*Source: Action*

## TMA Winter Conference

The Texas Legislature will be in full swing come January, and you won't want to miss any of the action at TMA's 2009 Winter Conference in Austin Jan. 30-31. The conference will offer media training, a dawn duster on e-prescribing, and a discussion of legislative priorities and TMA's health care agenda by prominent politicians.

Mark your calendar now to be at the Hyatt Regency Austin on Jan. 30 and 31 for all the excitement. Go to [www.texmed.org](http://www.texmed.org) or call **800-880-1300, ext. 1421**, for more information.

## Tools to navigate the coding maze

Physicians go to medical school so they can learn how to take care of sick and injured people. However, medical coding — putting the right codes in the right boxes in an insurance billing claim — is the financial engine that drives a medical practice.

To help physicians navigate the coding maze, the Texas Medical Association (TMA) is releasing two new tools for physicians. TMA's free e-book, *TMA Practice E-Tips Greatest Hits, Vol. 3: Coding*, instructs physicians about coding issues. TMA also issued a downloadable audio podcast on the topic. "Cracking the Code" is a Podcast TMA program featuring TMA staff reimbursement specialists Drena James and Erin Gregorcyk. Among the topics they cover:

- Why coding is such a difficult problem for physicians' offices.
- Some of the most common evaluation and management coding errors, and what doctors' offices can do to prevent them.
- Coding for Medicare vs. Medicaid and commercial insurance.
- How physicians should code for telephone consults.
- Coding modifiers and how they cause problems.
- Consultations vs. referrals.
- How TMA can help member physicians avoid coding problems and fight coding misinterpretations.

"The coding battle is a never-ending arms race, but with tools like this, TMA provides the ammunition needed to improve physicians' chances of economic survival," adds Dr. Sidney Ontai, Chair of the TMA Practice Management Services.

*TMA Practice E-Tips* is a free, bimonthly e-mail newsletter for TMA member physicians and their office staff. Each edition provides inside advice and practical solutions for managing a successful medical practice. Practice management education and consulting are two member benefits for TMA physicians.

Thus far this year, TMA has released two other reviews of the most popular TMA practice e-tips: *TMA Practice E-Tips Greatest Hits, Vol. 1*, covering embezzlement in the medical practice and working with irate patients, with the accompanying podcast, "Getting Ripped Off From the Inside"; and *TMA Practice E-Tips Greatest Hits, Vol. 2: Medical Records and Privacy*, with its podcast, "Medical Records and EMRs — What You Need to Know."

You can access all these resources on the TMA Web site. Visit [www.texmed.org](http://www.texmed.org), click on Practice Management on the left, then click on E-Tips.

*Source: TMA*

### 2009 GCMS OFFICERS

**President:** *Thomas Kimbrough, M.D.*

**President Elect:** *Daniel Piazza, D.O.*

**Vice President:** *Barbara Thompson, M.D.*

**Secretary Treasurer:** *Mary Godinick, M.D.*

## Add you and your staff to GCMS listserv

Galveston County Medical Society maintains an e-mail listserv to keep you and your office staff informed about timely information on billing, coding, health insurance companies, Medicare, Medicaid and other issues that affect your reimbursement.

The GCMS office receives valuable information on a daily basis that we would like to pass on to you and/or your office staff. We receive notices from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, new requirements by insurance companies, helpful Web sites and much more.

Please send your e-mail address and/or the e-mail address of your staff person to Louise Geerts in the GCMS office: [louise\\_geerts@hcms.org](mailto:louise_geerts@hcms.org).

## FIRST TUESDAYS *continued from page 1*

When the Texas Legislature convenes in January 2009, it will face serious challenges—more attempts to overturn our liability reforms, physician ownership, insurance transparency, scope of practice, and more.

Since 2003, physicians, Alliance members, students, and medical societies from around the state have converged on Austin the first Tuesday of each month for *First Tuesdays at the Capitol*. Representatives and senators from both parties say “those white coats” in their offices and in the gallery definitely helped in passing our historic tort reforms in 2003 and kept dozens of bad bills at bay in 2007.

*First Tuesdays at the Capitol* needs physicians and spouses from all across Texas. For more information, go to [www.texmed.org](http://www.texmed.org) or e-mail Louise Geerts at [louise\\_geerts@hcms.org](mailto:louise_geerts@hcms.org). We need you to carry your message to the legislators.

# Business of Medicine

## Keep up with changes

It's time to get prepared for changes in patients' deductibles, co-pays and health insurance carriers, effective Jan 1.

The big question to ask your patients and payers is: “What changes will occur for you, come the first of the year?” For patients, notate any changes in their records. For payers, create a spreadsheet that lists CPT and HCPCS codes down the left side and your payers (including Medicare) across the top. Populate the spreadsheet accordingly with the new allowances. Review this spreadsheet with your front desk staff so that they fully understand the new amounts they need to collect from patients. Instruct them to ask patients these key questions:

1. Have you changed insurance carriers? May I see your new insurance card? (Staff needs to be sure to scan the card or at least make a copy.) For your Medicare patients, follow with a second question: So are you still with such-and-such plan or have you recently chosen another Medicare plan?
2. Have you met your deductible for this year?
3. Will today's payment be with cash, check or credit card?

Provide your staff with the means to determine whether a patient has an outstanding balance – either electronically or a list given out each day. If a patient visiting the office that day does owe the practice money, your front desk staff should add the past due amount to the current visit.

Also, be aware that an increasing number of patients are using high deductible health savings accounts. These plans are becoming more popular or are becoming mandatory by many employers. Collection of these amounts should be done after the visit to make sure you know the level of service (E&M) and diagnostic services provided to the patient for that visit. The first-of-the-year collection will be for the full amount of the visit, since most high-deductible plans start at \$2,500 or more.

Making the collection at the time of visit is the most efficient method for collections. Awareness and training of the reception staff will make the start of 2009 collections a good one.

*Source: Physicians Practice*

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## New Members

**Welcome to TMA/GCMS membership...Regan Nell Theiler, MD, UTMB Dept of Ob/Gyn, 409-379-9644...Residents...Dept of Anesthesiology – Elizabeth Navejas, MD, Brooke Leigh Baker, MD, Amy Marie Brummer, MD, William Carlisle Dudley, DO, Michael A. Harper, MD, Erik C. Hustak, MD, Hyung J. Kim, MD, Axel Rodriguez, MD, Erin Geordi Sreshta, MD, Kofi B. Vandyck MD...Jonathan H. Capelle, MD, orthopedic surgery, Keith T. Ellison, MD, orthopedic surgery, Lance Griffin, MD, general surgery, Elton R. Naidoo, MD, psychiatry, Steve A. Hamric, MD, diagnostic radiology, Eric W. Choy, MD, pediatrics, Mariam Orji, MD, general surgery, Sankaman Praisoody, MD, radiology, Andrew Ginzel, MD, radiology, Amber Pastusek, MD, psychiatry, and Tran Quan, MD, family medicine.**