Dear Members and Friends of TOMA,

As you have probably read, Congress has passed an extension on the current Medicare payment schedules that are based on the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula. The new law preserves the current funding formula until June 1st. The national politicians have passed a series of temporary sustaining laws that have delayed their planned 21.2% cut in the SGR unit payments. An interesting side effect has occurred that may or may not have been obvious at the time. The option period during which a physician can choose whether to change their participation in Medicare is March 17th. While Congress was dithering about how they could afford to permanently correct this disastrous payment formula, the date passed on which one could change the character of one’s participation. In other words, by delaying the decision until after March 17th, Congress trapped us into continuing our work for Medicare. Even if they don’t change the formula, we can’t drop out until next March 17th. Congressional staffers proved that they are not only greedy, they are clever.

As I have previously noted, the conundrum currently being suffered by those who brought us the new federal health program is that while they don’t want to alienate organized medicine by ignoring the problems with the SGR formula, they have already claimed $280 billion in savings for the new program that comes from decreasing these exact payments to medical providers of all types. They are eventually going to put off the decision until after the fall elections, but they have already taken advantage of our dedication by delaying action past Mar 17th. After spending hundreds of billions of dollars bailing out the banking system, they can’t find the courage to correct the current payment formulas so that American medicine can continue to care for our patients.

The TCOM saga continues. UNT-HSC president Scott Ransom has published an article in the Tarrant County Medical Society news that strongly recommends the addition of an allopathic degree in Fort Worth. This in spite of the evidence that the financial picture of the proposal is very cloudy, and that it can’t work with the publically advertised funding sources. We at TOMA have tried to educate elected officials, community leaders and potential donors as to the risk to TCOM and to UNT that is posed by this program. The Ransom article is the typical pie-in-the-sky portrayal of a degree that will be the greatest thing for Fort Worth since the arrival of the Bass family and the F-22. Millions of dollars of outside money will flow into town, hundreds of new physicians will move in, and the local hospitals will create hundreds of new residencies for the graduates of TCOM and of the new
Of course, as I have previously illustrated, it is a shell game that only works if the state funds the program with well over $100 million. That money would not be necessary if the new doctors needed by FW were graduates of increased class size at TCOM. The letters M.D. after a name does not make the individual any smarter, any better trained, or more qualified to care for the citizens of Texas than the letters D.O.

The Tarrant County delegation to the Texas Medical Association House of Delegates has introduced a resolution that backs the creation of the new degree program. The TMA HOD meets in Fort Worth on the weekend of April 30th, the same days as our TOMA HOD meets in Austin. We have been invited to appear at the resolutions committee that will discuss this issue. Although it is inconvenient, we will have an appropriate response for our fellow physicians that factually addresses the deficiencies of this proposal. We will also address the historic partnership between the two major components of the medical profession. This partnership has resulted in creating TCOM, in bringing the school into UNT, in creating tort reform for all citizens of Texas, and in developing strong local residency programs that provide competent physicians for our state. I have received advice from AOA board member Mark Baker, from past-president Rodney Wiseman, and from current leaders. I would like to have other opinions, regardless of your position on this issue, and I welcome your suggestions concerning our comments to the TMA.

We have lost another TOMA past-president. Russ Jenkins, former chief of surgery at TCOM and long-time adviser to the TOMA leadership has passed away on April 1st. Russ graduated from Kirksville in 1951 where he married, Connie, another D.O. This outstanding doctor mentored hundreds of osteopathic medical students and surgeons over a long and distinguished career and his counsel will be missed.

On March 30th, TOMA executive director Sam Tessen, Linda and I went to Lubbock for a meeting with district 10. This group exemplifies the outstanding contributions that have been made to our profession by leaders from small districts. Bob Maul, Greg Maul, and Jack McCarty are past presidents of TOMA. Pat Hanford is the current TOMA vice-president and Tony Hedges is a TOMA board member. We were joined by Sarah Mankin, John Whitham and Janene, Ron Cook, Tony Gonzales and Sheryl, Raymond Mann and Betty, Harlan Wright and Lynne, Richard Wetzel, Charles Wheeler and Pat, Rhonda Barr, and district president Steve Dalton. We enjoyed an educational program, and we discussed current issues in Texas medicine.

Sam, Linda, Mona and I will travel to Austin for a district 7 meeting on April 29th, and to Victoria for district 9 on May 13th. The TOMA board will meet on April 30th, and the TOMA House of Delegates will convene under Speaker Duane Selman and vice-speaker Ray Morrison on May 1st. The caucus of the House will elect next years’ officers on the evening of April 30th. I am going to make all of those meetings, and I will also represent you at the TMA HOD. President-elect Elizabeth Palmarozzi will assume responsibility for the portion of the board meeting while I am in Fort Worth, but I will return to Austin for the remainder of the agenda and for our House meeting.

Pictured below is the newest pre-osteopathic member of our family, our new grand-daughter Angelica Michelle Cole. This angel was born on April 11th in San Diego. It has been many years since I attended a birth, and this one was unique in many ways. Our daughter-in-law chose natural childbirth in a birthing center that was staffed by midwives. This is the way it used to be before concerns about litigation discouraged deliveries except by specialists. Angelica is the first child for our son, now 39, and he was very thankful that his mother and I were there for this monumental occasion. I was
reminded again of the many joys that are given by our relationship with our long-time patients and their family members.

As I am writing this afternoon, Linda and I are traveling by cruise ship. As always, we have learned much from our fellow travelers, most of whom have retired from the vigor’s of active work, and who are eager to share their life experiences and their concerns about their health care. Tomorrow, we are meeting relatives in Greenoch, Scotland, and we will then go on to other cruise ports. Fortunately, the ash plume from Iceland should dissipate by the end of the week so that we can return to Dallas. Life is good for osteopathic physicians in Texas, and we should all give thanks every day that we live in a free country with countless blessings. We should also thank God for the gift of joy that we receive from serving our patients with compassionate competence. Have fun with your families this week, and let me hear your thoughts, especially about the TMA House meeting.

Please let me hear from you.

George M. Cole, D.O.
President, TOMA
Clay, George & Angelica Michelle Cole

Linda & Angelica

(Hey, I add the pictures to these NEWSLETTERS so of course I am displaying my BRAND NEW granddaughter)