Dear Members and Friends of TOMA,

Well, we hope that is the last blast of winter. We had osteopathic friends in from Philadelphia, and they brought North Eastern weather with them. Pennsylvania Osteopathic Medical Association board of trustees member Dick Purse and his wife, APOMA past-president Leanne Purse were here for an educational seminar for osteopathic radiologists. AAOA past-presidents Rita Baker, Shirley Bayles and Linda Cole took Leanne on a shopping and cuisine tour of the metroplex. Following a marvelous dinner with the Purses on Saturday evening, we awakened to four inches of snow in Dallas. Next time, we will send Dallas weather home with them.

By the time you read these words, the elephant in the room will probably have broken out of the confines of back-room politics to ‘fix’ the system on which we depend for our health care, and to pay our family bills. Speaker Pelosi has scheduled a vote for Sunday that will pass the hotly contested health financing reform package. There have apparently been enough negotiated deals for the controlling votes to vote with the president. The Nebraska and Louisiana bribes are gone, but there are hundreds of millions of dollars in payoffs that will eventually become public knowledge. It is estimated that insurance company and other interested lobbyists have ‘invested’ over $1 million per congressman to influence the outcome of this mandate from the president. These businesses obviously believe that the federal subsidies will be beneficial to their profit structure. The president has won this round, and taxpayers will evaluate the progress. We will see how it plays out in November.

One of our own has been recognized as a leader in emergency medicine. TOMA member Robert Suter of Dallas was recently honored at the annual meeting of the American College of Emergency Physicians with the following citation;

Robert E. Suter, DO, FACEP

The John G. Wiegenstein Leadership Award, ACEP's highest honor, was presented to Robert E. Suter, DO, FACEP. The award goes each year to a current or past national leader in recognition of their
Dr. Suter is professor of emergency medicine and director of practice management and health policy at Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. Before joining UT Southwestern, Dr. Suter served as emergency department medical director at Spring Branch Medical Center in Houston, medical director for AMR-Dallas and a partner in Greater Houston Emergency Physicians.

Dr. Suter has a long and distinguished record of serving ACEP and the field of emergency medicine, including being the first osteopathic emergency physician to serve as ACEP president and the first person to work full time as an emergency medical technician and paramedic. He began working as a full-time EMT in 1979 and continued to do so until he graduated from medical school.

"John Wiegenstein was not only the inspiration and guiding force to the establishment of our specialty, he was a gentleman beloved by all," said Dr. Suter. "I am humbled to be the recipient of the award associated with the legacy of such a great man. It is the highest professional honor that any emergency physician could ever hope for."

Dr. Suter completed his undergraduate work at Washington University in St. Louis and earned his doctor of osteopathic medicine and MHA degrees from Des Moines University in Des Moines, IA. He completed his residency training in emergency medicine at Brooke Army-Wilford Hall USAF Medical Centers in San Antonio, TX.

All of us in TOMA are extremely proud of the contributions that Dr. Suter has made to the practice of emergency medicine, and we are grateful for his participation in the professional activities of his profession.

We are still looking for a few good men and women who would like to be involved in the activities of the AOA. President-elect Karen Nichols will be making her appointments to the committees and bureaus of the association, and we would like to have additional volunteers from Texas. Our state is very well represented with Mark Baker on the board of trustees, Ray Morrison as vice-speaker of the House, and numerous committee chairs and members. We would like to add to the current list, so please consider helping your profession by assisting the leadership in managing their responsibilities.

We are sad to learn of the loss of another faculty member at TCOM. Bernard Rubin has been associated with the school for 27 years, and has been recognized as a very well-respected educator. He has been a two-term member of the board of trustees of JPS, and is a former chair of internal medicine at TCOM. Dr. Rubin is leaving our fair state for Detroit, and a position with Henry Ford Hospital. His move creates another void in the osteopathic teaching atmosphere at TCOM, and we regret this additional loss of experience for students.

Many times this year, I have written thoughts that I hoped would stimulate your understanding of the processes that have transformed our lives through change. One occasionally sees others writings that are apocryphal, and the following is an example. Business and Commercial Aviation is a journal that I receive monthly. The magazine deals with jet aviation issues that are far beyond my flying habits, but a recent editorial caught my attention. William Garvey titled his piece
“Pilots Optional”. He discussed the rapid progress made by drones in the war theaters of Iraq and Afghanistan, along the borders with Mexico, and in intercepting drug smugglers. Mr. Garvey talked about the progress of railroad engineers from the masters of a useful and dangerous beast to becoming a computer monitor managed from afar. He went on to compare the status of airline pilots with the railroad engineer, and postulated the end of the days when the pilot is depicted as the heroic magician who is essential to the flight. He speculated about how long it would take until passengers would be comfortable flying in a plane with no on-board pilots.

A corollary can be made with our profession. Although doctors are still one of the most respected members of society, managed care, professional liability risks and effectiveness of care protocols have changed our lives. When legal considerations have prohibited pharmaceutical companies from bringing pens and paper to your office, there is something wrong in the henhouse. There is a growing trend in the national debate to transform family practice into multiple layers of practitioners who have never set foot in a medical school or a hospital. From the use of advanced nurse practitioners to physicians assistants to large clinic ‘medics’, the business interests are on a strategic mission to denigrate the relationship between physician and patient. As I said in my presidential address last June, YOU ARE NOT A PROVIDER. You are osteopathic physicians, with a comprehensive education and experience that prepares you to care for your patients as whole persons, not a disease code that requires a guideline to specify what treatment is appropriate and cost-effective.

Physicians Optional?

It is our responsibility to continue our work to protect the health of our patients by drawing a firewall between the profit motives of insurance carriers and the dedicated commitment that we serve. TOMA has representatives at the state and national levels whose dedicated efforts are performed on your behalf. Frankly, I believe that the example set by your everyday activities is the strongest factor in preserving the doctor/patient relationship. However, we need your help in dealing with politicians and other policy stakeholder groups. Please consider volunteering to serve.

Finally, today, I want to address the students at TCOM. I am not deaf, and I have heard the rumblings of discontent among certain student groups regarding their participation with TOMA and the AOA. The last few years have seen a resurgence in commitment from most of the student body and these fine representatives have been heard at the highest levels of the organized osteopathic profession. Your insightful contributions have helped us formulate strategic policies that will last into the next generation. We at TOMA have strongly encouraged the inclusion of students in the deliberations of our House of Delegates, our Board of Trustees, and our committee structure. Your opinions are valued by our leadership, and we will always welcome your participation in all of our activities. TOMA members founded TCOM, TCOM executive directors and members have led legislative advances that included the integration with UNT and the formation of the Health Science Center, and TOMA has been in the forefront in the discussion regarding protecting the heritage of TCOM from the costs of establishing an allopathic school. Administrations come and go, but TOMA will always be here as your political partner. TOMA will always be here to represent your profession at the TMB, at the legislature, at state regulatory bodies, and with the AOA. I promise you that We Will Never Leave You.
As I am writing this morning, I am sitting on the porch in North Dallas, looking out at the strong wind that is stirring the trees and that is melting the overnight snow. Whatever the folks do in Washington, the sun will come up again tomorrow, and we will have patients to see who will welcome our wisdom and counsel. 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.

Please let me hear from you.

George M. Cole, D.O.
President, TOMA

1st Day of Spring in Texas