

**1/18/01**

**OVERVIEW**

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FILE

Senate Finance Committee

1/18/01

Testimony of Peter Lawrason, MD  
President, Alaska State Medical Association

Cochairman Kelly, committee members, thank you for this opportunity to address you this morning.

I am Peter Lawrason, an OB/GYN practicing in Fairbanks. Today I represent the Alaska State Medical Association (ASMA) who represents Alaska's patients and the physicians who care for them. I am the current president of ASMA.

Soon, we hope that SB 37 will be addressed by your committee. I urge you to support this bill, which is important to all physicians in Alaska. However, today I will not provide you with any detailed testimony, as the appropriate time for that will be at a later date.

I am leaving you a copy of testimony that I will present to House HESS this afternoon. This will hopefully give you a feel for a day in the life of a physician in Alaska today. I simply ask that you remember this as over the next two years you debate the health care measures that come before you.

Mr. Cochairman, with your permission, I would like to introduce an esteemed visitor who wishes to address the committee.

Donald J. Palmisano, MD, JD, is a general and vascular surgeon in New Orleans, Louisiana. Dr. Palmisano is a member of the American Medical Association's Board of Trustees, being first elected in 1996 and re-elected in 1999. He serves on AMA's Executive Committee and its Board, the Finance Committee, and he chairs its Compensation Committee.

Dr. Palmisano is also a former president of the Louisiana State Medical Association. As you heard, there is also a JD after his name. He attended Loyola University School of Law, graduating in 1982 and is licensed to practice law in Louisiana. By the way, he attended law school while maintaining his surgical practice. I've provided you a copy of his CV so you may see the full range of Dr. Palmisano's contributions to medicine and society in general.

Dr. Palmisano serves as AMA's point person on privacy and confidentiality as well as anti-trust reform to allow negotiations by self-employed physicians.

Today, Dr. Palmisano will be addressing you in regards to the need for anti-trust reform. Accompanying him is AMA staff person Becky Dadura. Becky testified before the committee last year in regards to SB 256. She is an attorney with AMA's Advocacy Resource Center.

Thank you and I'm available to answer any questions, which you may have now or in the future.

Home Health Education and Social Service Committee  
1/18/01

Testimony of Peter Lawrason, MD President  
Alaska State Medical Association

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to dialogue with you today. Chairman Dyson, committee members, I am Peter Lawrason, an OB/GYN practicing in Fairbanks. I am also the President of the Alaska State Medical Association, which represents Alaska's patients and the physicians who care for them.

I am not here today to talk about any specific bills but am here to give you a look at the practice of medicine as it is today in Alaska. This is obviously based on my own practice and from speaking with my colleagues from all over the state. I just ask that you remember what I'm about to say as you debate the various bills that come before you over the next two years.

Being an OB/GYN, my days and nights tend not to be differentiable. But I love every minute of every day spent in the care of patients. And, I hate every minute of every day spent with the process of being compensated for the caring for those patients. I went into medicine to care for people, not to shuffle paper.

Unfortunately, more of my day each year is spent dealing with paper- mostly dealing with trying to get paid by third party payors. The mantra I continue to hear from my billing staff and my colleagues is: NO PAY- SLOW PAY- LOW PAY.

I wish I didn't have to deal with those issues, but they are a part of life in medicine today. All of us in private practice have overhead to support. (You know, office rent, payroll for nurses, billing clerks, health insurance, fire insurance, liability insurance, payroll taxes, etc.) So, yes, I must deal with those issues and that in part is why I am here today. By the way, my professional liability premiums are in excess of \$40,000 per year.

Physicians need to be involved in the legislative process so that all of you have an idea of what goes on in our professional lives.

Here's a composite of a typical day in my life:

- Up at 5:30 AM, go for a swim
- Oops, its Wednesday, have an ASMA meeting at 7:00 AM
- Oh what a great day, call from the hospital, two OB patients at Labor and Delivery, run to hospital check on them.
- Do ASMA board meeting from the hospital, waiting for the beeper to buzz signaling the impending births.
- Finish ASMA board meeting at 8:05, still no beeper so run to the office to see first patient at 8:15 AM.
- 8:30 call from the hospital, first mom ready to go - run to the hospital, do the delivery, ALL RIGHT! A healthy little girl.
- Called to next room for the second delivery, problem with mom 2- can't wait; need to do a C-section right now. Complications, but baby OK and mom 2 is now OK with new son.

- YIKES, run back to office; arrive at 11:00, patients backed up. What's lunch for anyway? Besides, lunchtime on Wednesday is spent in clinic business meeting (remember, NO PAY- SLOW PAY- LOW PAY!)
- 2:00 PM- run back to hospital to check on moms and kids- everything going great, run back to the office arrive 2:20.
- Continue seeing patients with the last one leaving the office at 5:30 PM.
- Time to go home? NO, got to do charts, go back to the hospital, check on moms and kids.
- Finally, get in car; arrive at home at 8:30 PM, just in time to tuck my little ones into bed.
- AH! Cold dinner at 9:00 PM, What a treat!
- On yeah, I'm on "city call" for the ER this week as well- call at 11:30 PM to come to the ER. Pregnant woman involved in a car accident, 7 months pregnant, appears labor is beginning. Get her stabilized, was false labor. Time to go home- its 2 AM. Great, I'll get 3 hours of sleep tonight in my own bed!

Obviously, this was a busy day and probably busier than the usual, but nevertheless indicative of many of my days. Many of my colleagues face very similar days. Those in rural practices tend to be true 24/ 7/ 365 workers. I don't know how they do it!

The foregoing may give you an idea of why physicians become irritable when faced with more bureaucracy. Of course, some bureaucracy is necessary, but the extent of some is beyond belief. For example, Medicare, with in excess of 100,000 pages of regulations expects us to be cognizant of each section that may pertain to us when treating a Medicare patient. I understand that Medicare is a federal, not state program, but use it as an example of regulations run amok. After all, IRS has only a mere 10,000 pages of regulations.

Buried in those thousands of pages are unfunded mandates such as the latest, which would require that interpreters be provided for nearly every patient with limited English proficiency. Communication is essential and many times we are able to use family members to act as interpreters. This is not an ideal situation, but the new guidelines from HCFA would preclude the use of a family member for both Medicare and Medicaid Patients.

Our patients are also changing. Some changes are good for care others are detrimental! They are more knowledgeable (from surfing the internet), they are self-referring to specialists, and are demanding the latest technology and drugs be used. Our patients are also more likely to be self-treating with herbs and food supplements. Some are helpful, some harmful, and some we don't know what they do- or how they may react with other prescription medicines. Advances in medical technology are occurring at a dizzying pace with no slow down in sight. This includes new drugs, "black boxes", surgical techniques, and genetic mapping. Of course, a cost is associated with most of these advances, with often times, you being called upon to deal with those issues.

Both you and we in the physician community face challenging times. We are here to work with you in meeting those challenges.

I'd be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

# American Medical Association

Physicians dedicated to the health of America



**Donald J. Palmisano, MD, JD**  
Member, Board of Trustees  
American Medical Association

Donald J. Palmisano, MD, JD, a general and vascular surgeon from New Orleans, Louisiana, was elected to the AMA Board of Trustees in 1996 and re-elected in 1999. He serves on the Executive Committee, the Finance Committee and chairs the Compensation Committee. He is a former president of the Louisiana State Medical Society and has received numerous AMA Physician Outreach Awards for membership recruitment.

Dr. Palmisano serves as the AMA's point person on privacy and confidentiality as well as antitrust reform to allow joint negotiations by self-employed physicians. In addition, he is the spokesperson for the Litigation Center of the AMA and State Medical Societies. Other assignments include the Internet and patient safety. Dr. Palmisano is on the Board of Directors of the National Patient Safety Foundation and chairs the Development Committee. He is a member of the Board of Commissioners of the JCAHO, and serves on the Advisory Board of the Annenberg Center for Health Sciences.

In 2000, Dr. Palmisano was one of 60 American "opinion leaders" chosen by the Department of Defense to participate in the Joint Civilian Orientation Conference (JCOC 63). This 9-day program allowed Dr. Palmisano to visit military bases of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard and learn about our fighting forces, their equipment and capabilities, and national defense strategies.

Board-certified in surgery, and a fellow of the American College of Surgeons, Dr. Palmisano is in the private practice of surgery in New Orleans with four other surgeons. He played a key role in the passage of the landmark Louisiana Medical Malpractice Act of 1975, helping to plan and implement the tort reform.

A graduate of Tulane University in New Orleans, Dr. Palmisano entered Tulane University School of Medicine and received his medical degree with honors in 1963. Internship and residency in surgery were at Tulane and Charity Hospital of New Orleans. He then served in the US Air Force as chief of surgery for the 821st Medical Group (SAC) and received the Air Force Commendation Medal for his skill, knowledge, and leadership after a major aircraft (B-52) crash. Dr. Palmisano's published clinical research efforts have included systemic heparinization during catheter angiography, the first documentation that copper is an essential nutrient to adult health, and the world's first published operative photograph of a double gallbladder. He is clinical professor of surgery and clinical professor of medical jurisprudence at Tulane. Dr. Palmisano was elected President of the Tulane Surgical Society for the year 1999-2000.

Dr. Palmisano attended Loyola University School of Law in New Orleans and was elected to the Blue Key National Honor Society. In 1982, he received his Juris Doctorate and is licensed to practice law in Louisiana. He has served on the Governor's Commission on Medical Malpractice, was chair of the legal subcommittee of the Governor's Commission on Organ Donations, and currently chairs the Louisiana Medical Disclosure Panel that determines therapy risks.

Dr. Palmisano was a founding member of a physician-owned professional liability company, and subsequently founded Intrepid Resources®/The Medical Risk Manager Company, a firm providing professional liability claims handling and risk management consultation to physicians, clinics, and hospitals. He serves as president and he is a frequent lecturer on a wide variety of topics including risk management, patient safety, informed consent, managed care, and tort reform. His medical and legal publications include co-authoring the monograph, *Informed Consent - A Survival Guide*, and writing the risk management section on informed consent for the American College of Surgeons' book, *Professional Liability/Risk Management*.

An accomplished photographer specializing in nature and macrophotography, Dr. Palmisano and his wife, Robin, reside in Metairie, Louisiana. He has three grown children.

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