

NKMS Society Rounds

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President's Report

No one has a crystal ball but 2024 is shaping up to be the most divisive year in US history since the late 1960's Vietnam Era.

These growing tensions domestically will continue up and may be through the election. In addition, the ever expanding conflicts in the Middle East represent a threat to our increasing involvement. Conflict expansion will be predicated on perceived weakness in the US. We see history repeating itself as was seen during the Carter years with the Iran hostage situation in 1979. This lasted for 444 days ending abruptly with the election of Ronald Reagan and the release of the hostage just minutes after he was inaugurated. Iran responds only to strength.

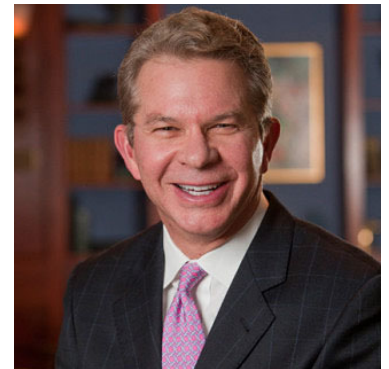
Economic trends for 2024 show a soft landing rather than a significant recession. Inflation will continue to hover around 3% which is down from consumer price inflation which peaked at 9% over the last two years. In 2023, the market rally was based on tech stocks focusing on the evolving use of AI. In fact, AI focus stocks gained 43% in 2023. The use of AI will be an increasing tool in healthcare, and will be driven by the labor shortage, especially in the health sector.

The FED, which has become more of a political animal than in the days of Alan Greenspan, will be under pressure to cut rates. Projected cuts this year will push mortgage rates back down to 5.5-6% from their high of 8% in 2023. However, for many of our patients home ownership will be outside their reach. The current new home buyers average age now is 36 years old.

Labor shortages will continue in the healthcare sector which represent a significant cost for hospitals. Each of us weekly get notices of waiting times and admissions on hold from the emergency rooms in North Kentucky. This shortage currently has no end in sight. This will continue to push up the need for outpatient services. The cause and the cost of EMR's continues to push consolidation of private groups into larger corporate structures. These larger groups will represent another option for new physicians rather than hospital employment. This may likewise increase pressure on access.

Politically, physicians had become less involved as many new physicians have elected to go into "employed jobs" out of residency. Physicians now cannot afford starting practices from scratch because of EMR and labor cost. These trends will continue to result in a division in medical services between private corporate practices with physician owners and hospital employed physicians.

The issue at hand, therefore, is the declining participation of physicians in organized medicine, which used to represent their voice politically. Look what has happened to the AMA, only 15% of all doctors are AMA members. Physician lobbying is now done primarily by Physician Specialty Societies, such as in my case, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgery. However, the main lobbying in medicine is still done by the pharmaceutical companies and the hospitals. This occurs not just in Washington but also in Frankfort. Thus leading us finally to my point. Remember all politics are local. Also remember that if you do not participate in making decisions, some one else will make them for you.



John Larkin, MD
President, NKMS

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2024 Events

February 21, KMA Physicians' Day at the Capitol

April 16, NKMS Executive Board Meeting

May 11, Family Fun Day at Florence Y'Alls

July 16, NKMS Executive Board Meeting

August 23-25, KMA Annual Meeting

September 17, NKMS Executive Board Meeting

October 3, Meet Your Legislators Dinner

November 19, NKMS Executive Board Meeting

December 13, Holiday Party

KMA's new "CME Guarantee" program allows member physicians to receive access to at least 30 hours of Category I Continuing Medical Education credit each three-year cycle at no cost. For more information on the CME Guarantee program, contact Miranda Mosley, mosley@kyma.org.

KMA QR Code



President's Report

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The Kentucky legislative session began on January 2nd, 2024 and ends on April 15th, 2024. What are the issues that are relevant to you this session? First is house bill 134(HB 134/HCSI). Currently 82% of Kentucky physicians feel that the time it takes to get authorization for prescription refills or radiologic services, such as MRI prevent access to timely care. Physicians on average spend four hours a week on peer-to-peer review for authorization of medical services. In addition, our staff of nurses and MAs spend 15 hours a week requesting care for our patients. Again driving up the cost of healthcare.

HB 134 is a start to limit prior authorizations. The sponsors of this bill are representatives Kim Moser, Dr. Moser's wife, (Gex, pronounced Jay) Williams, C. Anull, N. Kulkarni, J. Raymond, S. Stalker, and C. Stebenson. It takes 15 minutes to email these legislators. Go to legislature.ky.gov/legislators and email these representatives. Click on the legislator of your choice and e-mail them. Kentucky has the opportunity to lead on this issue nationally.

In the Senate, bill 103 is up to allow the establishment of freestanding birthing centers. This would allow deliveries outside of the hospital setting. This bill also would exempt the facility from CON if it has less than four beds. This represents a controversial bill which is opposed by the hospitals.

Senate bill 42 (SCR 42) and House bill 202 deal with certificate of need. This is now in committee and represents a move to decrease the restrictions of certificate of need in Kentucky. About 35 states still have some limits on CON. Ohio does not have CON.

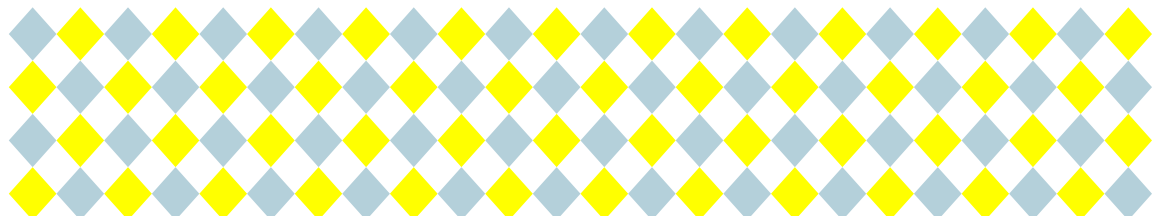
CON requires a geographic medical market to demonstrate the need for additional health care services, such as hospital beds or surgical services. It also restricts nursing home beds and rehab services.

This bill was sponsored by senators: M. Proctor, S. Rowlin, S. Doan, M. Hart, J. Hodgeson, S. Maddox, C. Massaroni, and M. Tate. Please take time to let these senators know your thoughts on these issues. It takes only 15 minutes! These legislators value your opinion as a physician, and it carries an immense amount of weight with them. Think how many of their constituents you see in one week. Doctors have a huge political power; however, they rarely utilize it. These legislators understand the political power of us and our patients far more than we do.

Doctor's Day in Frankfort is on February 21st of 2024. We will be taking a contingency to Frankfort and we will have meetings set up with these legislators regarding these issues. The more the better and we will be happy to arrange transportation or go in a caravan down to Frankfort together.

We may not change the larger trends of where Medicine is going, however, we can change our local issues. Each of you will have to decide what role gives you the most control in your life to take care of your patients. Each of you made the decision to go into Medicine because you wanted to help people. Having a daughter who is a doctor at Mayo Clinic and a son who is in Tech in New York City, I have seen the differences which these choices and results can have. As I told my daughter when she chose to become a doctor, the choice is not about what job you have, it is about what life you will live. The money in Tech is very seductive to the brightest and the best of our college students. However, the choice that you have made is the most rewarding. A life in Medicine is fraught with incredible highs and despairing lows. In the end, however, you will be rewarded knowing that your life has made a difference to your patients.

In closing my plea to you is to join the Northern Kentucky Medical Society and the Kentucky Medical Association, let us help you take control of the issues that affect your ability for you to take care of your patients. We are there to represent you, but we can only do so if you are there for us.

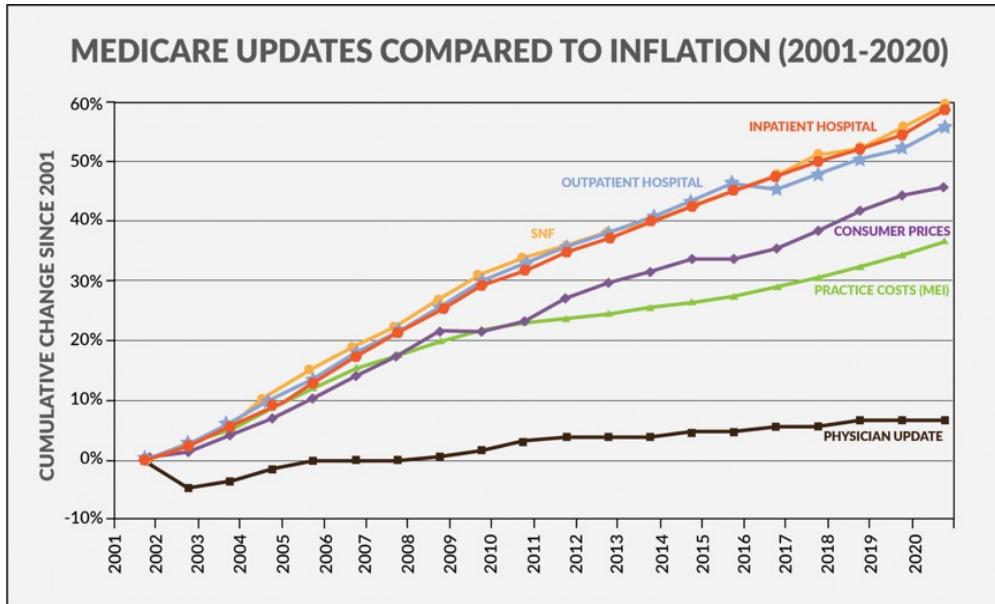


Are You Sitting Idly By? Others Couldn't be Happier!

The American Medical Association's (AMA) key advocacy focus is - fixing the Medicare physician payment system. When adjusted for inflation, Medicare physician payments have been reduced 26% from 2001-2023. One of the chief reasons for this decrease is because the Medicare physician payment system lacks an adequate annual payment update to keep pace with inflation, which is unlike updates that are applied to other Medicare provider payments. This must be corrected!



Don Swikert, MD
AMA Delegate
KMA Advocacy Chair



Sources: Federal Register, Medicare Trustees' Reports and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

The Kentucky Medical Associations (KMA) key advocacy focus is reducing prior authorization barriers. The two words - prior authorization - can make the delivery and receipt of health care a nightmare for both patients and physicians. Prior authorization has become a tool to clearly delay and deny care for patients. This misuse must be corrected!

Physicians are a critical part of the efforts to solve these and other important issues. However, many physicians forego joining organizations such as NKMS, KMA, and AMA, mistakenly assuming that others are advocating on their behalf. This results in fewer physicians advocating for their profession and patients. Conversely, more physician voices are the resources required for successful advocacy. Strong voices at the "policy table" exerts influence on key issues, which include:

- Administrative hassles that burden physicians daily, making them feel powerless to affect meaningful changes in patient care.
- Falling Medicare payment rates, which to reiterate, have decreased by 26% since 2001 when adjusted for inflation. By failing to adjust Medicare payments to inflation and preventing other cuts, such as the 3.4% cut due in 2024, policymakers are stating that physicians work is worth less. Bruce Scott, MD, of Louisville, who is President-elect of AMA and former president of KMA, is leading the effort to reform the Medicare payment system.
- Attempts to make the patient-physician interaction more limited and focused on technology processes - robbing the physician and patient of building a bond of trust and ultimately developing an effective treatment plan.

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Are You Sitting Idly By? Others Couldn't be Happier!

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- Hostile litigation environment that continues to plague physician practice. To counter this, the Litigation Center of the AMA and State Medical Societies represents the interests of the medical profession in state and federal courts. The Center has participated in over 1000 cases, many of which have set important legal precedents and had broad legal implications.
- Continual attempts by non-physician groups to expand scope of practice. AMA, in partnership with state associations, including KMA, have provided over three million dollars in grants to counter scope of practice expansion legislation and promote Truth in Advertising. This partnership has been tremendously helpful with our arguments that patients deserve physician-led care.

Health policy is influenced by many other groups, including drug companies, medical technology companies, insurers, and more. Their policy objectives do not necessarily represent your or your patients' interest. Physicians reluctant to join NKMS, KMA, and/or AMA are 'relinquishing' their power. This increases the influence of others and contributes to why Medicare payments are on the chopping block during every budget negotiation, why preauthorization reform efforts are difficult, why scope of practice expansion gets so much consideration, and why Statute and regulation policies intrude on patient exam rooms. We have two options: either unite with your physician colleagues by joining the Northern Kentucky Medical Society, the Kentucky Medical Association, and the American Medical Association to strengthen physician voice or be content to sit idly by while others decide our fate.