

# President's Page



## The end and the beginning

**B**y the time these words are printed, we will almost be at the end of another year. 2018 has been a fast-moving year, especially with the midterm political election cycle that concluded in November. Our established and new leaders in Congress will take us in different directions in regard to health care, which has been one of the main discussion topics all year. We hope that the many millions of dollars that were spent in this election cycle now are directed to more needed areas, especially to health care and the underserved.

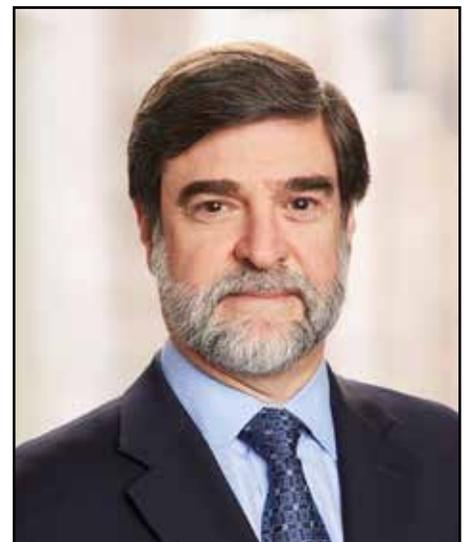
We are at the tip of the iceberg, particularly regarding the mega-mergers in health care. We have read about the CVS-Aetna merger. The American Medical Association has raised concern about this merger, and the issues related to protecting patients and services. We also have seen the discussions in Texas, of the merger of Baylor Scott & White Health with Memorial Hermann Health System in Houston. No question, these will be game-changers in Texas health care, and we must be cautious

of the unintended consequences of these unions. CMS has recognized that consolidation and decreased competition bring about the unexpected consequences of smaller hospital closures, interfering with needed services in underserved areas. Will these mergers improve quality of care, expand services to needed communities, control costs? Time will tell.

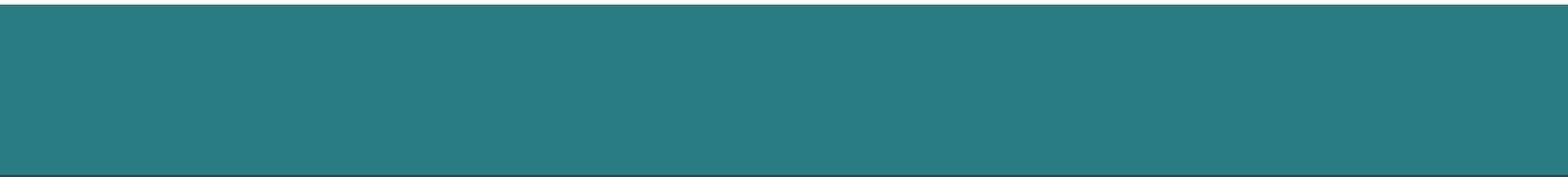
The media continue to report on the lack of or denial of services that patients need. The current system does not support improving needed services for this vulnerable population. And now, we have another potential disruptive trend: Medicare Advantage programs. Recent media coverage has shown that most large insurance companies are making billions of dollars, while limiting needed services to patients instead of expanding those services. In addition, the US Justice Department is investigating some of these MA plans. Time will tell how this plays out, but we all need to be more transparent and help our patients.

Some major issues remain, and we

must work on solutions. Congress, hospital systems, payers, the medical profession, and other healthcare workers need to work together to move ahead. The most important issues include improving services to our vulnerable population, improving the broken Medicaid system, improving the



Ruben L. Velez, MD



**We are at the tip of the iceberg, particularly regarding the mega-mergers in health care. ... No question, these will be game-changers in Texas health care, and we must be cautious of the unintended consequences of these unions.**

Affordable Care Act (without destroying the positive changes), relieving the redundant and unnecessary regulations affecting physicians, and controlling the cost of pharmaceuticals. We have enough work ahead of us. We can do this, if we stick together. Together, we can walk far.

To finish this page, I would like to thank some special people I have had the honor to work with in the last year. Through the years I have been blessed to be associated with extremely intelligent colleagues who have expanded my limitations. It is impossible to mention each one of them, but I would like to mention a few. Dallas County Medical Society has had a special group of physician leaders on its board of directors since its inception in 1876. Their advice and direction have been key in the success of your Society. I want to thank Dr. Lee Ann Pearse and Dr. Jim Walton, with whom I have closely worked. Aside from becoming friends, they have been wonderful mentors and dreamers of how we can improve health care in Texas. They have opened my horizons of what

could be possible.

And then there is Dr. John Carlo, DCMS immediate past-president, who is extremely organized and focused on the problems facing medicine. His advice has been key in many of the difficult tasks ahead of us. I could never thank him enough for his support, friendship and leadership.

In addition, DCMS has incredible staff that have become my second family. They have taken good care of me through this journey; they're dependable and focused. Two of these staff members with whom I have been more involved are Tracy Casto and Cara Jagers. Tracy has kept me well-organized and on track. She has been my "Siri" with DCMS. Cara has been the driver of special events. She keeps them well-organized and keeps me out of trouble. Her experience makes the task at hand easier. This wonderful staff is led by two special people: Michael Darrouzet and Connie Webster, who have become my friends for life. They have been the heart and soul of the Dallas County Medical

Society because of their experience and history with DCMS, but more because of their personalities and positive attitudes. The Society should be grateful and honored to have Connie and Michael's leadership, loyalty and hard work. Thank you to both.

And now at the end of this year, I leave you in the capable hands of Dr. Kevin Klein, an anesthesiologist. He has the wisdom and tools that will take DCMS to the next level. I once asked an anesthesiologist friend about being paid to put people to sleep. He responded that his work is more important than putting people to sleep. It's to keep patients healthy and stable during difficult times and waking them up, and they're in better health than when they went to sleep. Dr. Klein also will help us wake up to a better healthcare system.

As parents, we teach our young children what many of us were taught: to be inclusive, play with everyone in the play yard, share the toys. I leave these simple words to our new political leaders. **DMJ**