



NEWS LETTER

April 2008

Colleagues:

"It was the best of times and the worst of times" by Charles Dickens

The first quarter of the year was eventful.

There were two landmark events in medicine in Jamaica that have evoked contrasting emotions – the abolition of user fees in the public health sector on April 1 and the launch of Medical Doctors' Week on April 3-7, 2008.

While the abolition of user fees resulted in a heightening of tension as the public health sector hustled to implement it and the healthcare workers braced themselves to deal with it, the inauguration of Medical Doctors' Week left us feeling exhilarated, as it provided an avenue to celebrate who we are and what we do as doctors. It was an opportunity to remind the public of the positive role we play in maintaining the health and well being of the nation. It enabled us to serve and educate the public at large and to honour a doctor whom the public felt embodied the qualities of a Good Physician.

ABOLITION OF USER FEES

For those of us who work in the public health care system, anxiety at the abolition of user fees is high. With the experience of the eighties and early nineties fresh in our minds, there are heightened fears that we will regress to the bad old days of chronic persistent shortage of simple but essential equipment and supplies. With the abolition of user fees, the chief executive officers of our hospitals no longer have access to readily available funds to respond quickly to the daily crises, which arise in any hospital, crises that can threaten the quality of health care delivered to our patients.

We are guided by the experience of the Bustamante Hospital for Children that has experienced a three-fold increase in the number of patients presenting to the Accident and Emergency Department since the removal of user fees for children (0-18 yrs). With no increase in the physical space available, the capacity of the physical plant to accommodate these persons has been challenging, waiting time has increased, frustration has been high and the health personnel have unfairly had to bear the brunt of all of this.

With the chronic shortage of nurses, pharmacists and pharmaceutical supplies and the unhelpful opening hours at the health centres, there has been a shift away from accessing care at these facilities to seeking medical

attention at Accident and Emergency Departments. This has caused a further bottleneck in the system.

As anticipated, these problems have surfaced several-times over since the removal of user fees for all age groups.

Suggestions laid on the table in meetings between the MAJ Executive and the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister included:

- Launching an educational media campaign appealing to the public to utilise the health centres and enlightening them about the role of the A+E.
- Strengthening the health centres in the areas of human resources, pharmaceutical and other supplies as well as extending the opening hours.
- Forging partnerships between the public and private sectors to facilitate dispensing of drugs and arranging for prescriptions to be filled across the health regions.

We are happy to announce that promises have been made and some have been fulfilled.

Now, user fees have been abolished, and, in the first few weeks, all the weaknesses of the health system have come to the fore with the most prominent being overcrowding of A&Es and acute shortages of pharmacists and drug supplies across the island.

We are assured by the Minister of Health, Rudyard Spencer that these will be addressed.

The removal of user fees is an opportunity to address the weaknesses that the public health sector now suffers from. It is a time to address human resource issues such as the cadre of physicians employed in the public health sector. It is a time to strengthen the primary care system and to extend the services offered there. It is an opportunity for the Ministry of Health to remove discrepancies in the terms of employment that presently exist across regional health authorities and to define the training needs for health personnel in a more comprehensive way.

We invite all our colleagues in the private sector to heed the call for physicians to work sessions in health centres and accident and emergency departments. Listen out for these calls.

ADVOCACY

A word on the budget: we are pleased to see that the budgetary allocation to the health sector has increased from the unacceptable 4.7% of the budget (2.7% of the GDP) to the present 5.6% (and to 3.3 % of GDP). This modest increase is still not sufficient to address the health sector needs. We pledge to continue to lobby for an increase in resources to this sector to the recommended 6 % of GDP.

MEDICAL DOCTORS' WEEK

Medical Doctors' Week was proclaimed as such by the Governor General on April 3, 2008.



A PROCLAMATION

By His Excellency the Most Honourable
Professor Sir KENNETH OCTAVIUS HALL,
Member of the Order of the Nation, Knight
Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished
Order of Saint Michael and Saint George,
Member of the Order of Jamaica,
Governor-General of Jamaica.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL

WHEREAS the health of a nation is the wealth of a nation:

AND WHEREAS Medical Doctors maintain or restore human health through the study, diagnosis and treatment of diseases and injury and do so utilizing special ethical and moral principles:

AND WHEREAS Medical Doctors' Week highlights the contribution of medical doctors to the health and well-being of the nation:

AND WHEREAS the Medical Association of Jamaica as an umbrella organization representing members of the medical fraternity assists in the professional and personal development, networking opportunities and other career-enhancing skills for medical doctors, enabling them to contribute optimally to the health and well-being of the society:

NOW THEREFORE, I, KENNETH OCTAVIUS HALL, Member of the Order of the Nation, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Member of the Order of Jamaica, Governor-General of Jamaica, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM the week April 3-7, 2008, as Medical Doctors' Week and call upon all citizens to join in recognizing these outstanding health care workers and provide them with support to continue their professional growth.

Given under my hand at King's House this 31st day of March 2008.

Highlights

The theme was "Obesity/Overweight: Know your risk". During the period, April 3 to 7, doctors across the island focused on educating and empowering Jamaicans to achieve wellness. The dates were chosen to coincide with the World Health Organization's World Health Day on April 7 of each year – which is used to draw worldwide attention to a subject of major importance to global health.

It was a week of activities in which promoting health and wellness was emphasized.

Media blitz

Presentations by and interviews with doctors promoting healthy lifestyles and focusing on Obesity were aired on several radio talk show programs.

Health Fairs

Health Fairs were held by the membership of the branches in Mandeville, Montego Bay and Kingston on April 5 and 6. Though it might have affected the turnout, the heavy rainfall did not dampen the enthusiasm of the doctors and sponsors that turned out to offer service. The effort was greatly appreciated by the patients who had blood pressure, sugar, cholesterol and HIV testing, PAP smears, BMI derivation, and were educated about Obesity, Nutrition (Central Branch) and Recognition of Child Abuse (WMAJ).

Good Physician Award

Patients across the island were invited to nominate a doctor they felt satisfied the criteria of a good physician which included compassion, ability to communicate well, sound medical skill and involvement in community outreach.

There were forty six nominees and in the end, Dr Guna Muppuri emerged the victor. He received the first Good Physician Award at a dinner held on Saturday April 5 at the residence of Dr. Warren Blake and Miss Dena Davis. At the dinner, MAJ also honoured the first graduates of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mona – the students from the illustrious class of 1948 – Drs Muriel Lowe, Donald Christian, Keith McKenzie, Owen Minott and Joseph Hall.

Run for Wellness

This event took place on Sunday April 6 at the University of the West Indies Ring Road. It was poorly supported but thanks to the exuberance of the few doctors who organized and participated, it proved worthwhile.

Supplement

The Medical Association of Jamaica Supplement was published in the Sunday Gleaner Outlook on April 6, 2008. It was a sixteen page document of messages, advertisements and articles about the MAJ.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank you, our colleagues, for participating in the activities of Medical Doctors' Week. This week will be recognized annually and we look forward to even greater support in the years to come.



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOOD PHYSICIAN 2008

Dr Guna Muppuri



The recipient of the first Good Physician Award Dr. Guna Sekhar Muppuri, came to Jamaica from India in March 1992 after graduating in 1991 with the M.B.,B.S degree from the Sri Venkateswara Medical College.

He has conducted a private medical practice for the past 17 years in Hanover.

A member of the Medical Association of Jamaica, Medical Council of Jamaica, Association of General Practitioners, Caribbean College of Family Practitioners and the Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Montego Bay, Dr. Muppuri has blended medicine with a very successful business enterprise in generic pharmaceuticals, the Indies Pharma in Jamaica and Pristine Pharma in the USA which sells drugs at a low cost to the Health Corporation of Jamaica. He is a dedicated sponsor of the Jamaica AIDS Support.

His other awards and accolades include the National Quality Award for Excellence in the Small Business Sector in 2006, the Best New Business Award and the Employment Creations Award. Congratulations Dr. Muppuri, you were well chosen!

CONGRATULATIONS

We wish to extend our heartiest congratulations to our distinguished colleague Dr Charles Denbow, a previous MAJ awardee, who received the Order of Distinction in the rank of Commander for his invaluable contribution to the field of Medicine in the capacity of practitioner, researcher and educator.

CONDOLENCES

We would like to express our deepest condolences to Dr Sonia Nixon on the untimely death of her husband; Dr Rudolph Shoucair on the untimely passing of his wife; Dr Rosie Hamilton on the death of her mother; and to the children of Dr Adeline Wynante Patterson and family of Dr Robin Sahoy on the loss of their loved ones. These colleagues made an unforgettable impact on the practice of Medicine in Jamaica.

CORNER ON MAJIF

The following represents an actual medicolegal case:

A Case of Borrowed Employees Negligence

A surgeon told an operating room nurse to remove a dressing and clean a child's skin in preparation for reducing a compound fracture of the clavicle. Later, when the cast was removed, there was a burn from the anterior shoulder to the small of the back. The child's parents sued. Only the surgeon was liable and had to pay.

Reason: The nurse was deemed a borrowed employee of the doctor

Lesson: Always specify what must be used to clean the skin or wound when requesting this be done.

Note: A hospital, when sued, can in turn sue a doctor shifting the onus of responsibility unto the doctor so as to reduce the hospital's liability!

Colleagues, it is imperative that we are clear and safe in our practice of medicine, that we garner knowledge about the rules that govern our profession and that we are covered for medical indemnity in the event of any mishaps. I encourage you to make MAJIF your choice.

MAJIF access for non-physicians

MAJ has amended the constitution to facilitate the access of Medical Indemnity Insurance through MAJIF by non-physician healthcare personnel eg pharmacists, physiotherapists, radiographers, dentists. (see attached document – Changing of Constitution and By-laws).

UPCOMING MAJ EVENTS

The Wellness Pavilion will be held by the MAJ in association with GlaxoSmithKline. Physicians will get free testing of blood glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure, and will have the opportunity to get immunized against Hepatitis A and B at a subsidized cost.

MAJ's Annual Symposium 2008 and Awards Banquet

Date: June 5-8, 2008

Theme: "Global Health: No man is an Island"

Venue: The Jamaica Pegasus Hotel

MAJ's Annual Awards Banquet

Date: June 7, 2008; Time: 7pm; Dinner: 8pm

Guest Speaker: The Hon. O. Bruce Golding, MP, *Prime Minister of Jamaica*

The awardees are: Drs Carmen Bowen-Wright, Marion Kisson Mangatal and Horatio Dunn.

For further information please contact the MAJ Secretariat.

Further details regarding the symposium can be obtained by visiting our website at www.medicalassnjamaica.com

Dr Rosemarie Wright-Pascoe
President

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