

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Bluebonnets have started to appear on the sides of Texas highways and roads and it is a tell tale sign that spring is in the air. America's beloved pastime baseball has started, NBA play-offs are here and all 3 Texas teams are in the play-offs. Go Texas!!

41st Annual Texas Meeting

We at TSGE are busy preparing for our next edition of Annual Texas meeting. Our program co-directors Dr. Jeffrey Lee and Dr. Ben Havemann with the help of the educational committee have put together another wonderful program for you. I encourage you to visit the TSGE website (tsge.org) to take a sneak peak at this year's program. I believe, this will be a highly regarded meeting. We are adding a fellows' program on Friday and video forum on Sunday.

The 41st Annual Program will be in beautiful Austin at the Hilton from Sept 23th to Sept 25th. Mark your calendars and do plan to attend!

Texas Legislative Update

With almost every breath of oxygen being sucked out of the political world by the race to become the President of the United States, now is a good time to draw our attention to issues closer to our practices and patients. TSGE continues to monitor and engage in several important topics at the state level.

Out of Network Balanced Billing

For many legislative sessions, the health plans have argued that a physician's ability to bill a patient for services provided out of network should be prohibited or severely curtailed. Furthermore, the health plans have argued to the Legislature that those physicians should accept whatever payment it offers to those physicians, even though no contract exists between the two.

Organized Medicine has argued that the health plans have put together inadequate networks of physicians and offer such low-ball fees that it makes entering into a contract with a particular health plan a losing proposition. Furthermore, physicians, as independent providers of a service in a free-market system, believe that they should be able to set a price for a service and expect reasonable compensation for services provided.

The issue is complicated, especially for patients who receive a 'surprise medical bill'. The issue has garnered extreme attention in state legislatures including New York, California, and Florida. <http://www.modernhealthcare.com/article/20160408/NEWS/160409899>

Here in Texas, organized medicine expects a major push by the health plan lobby and the patients' rights groups to pass a similar measure like the one recently adopted in Florida. While the issue of Out-of-Network Balanced Billing might be

more commonplace in other physician specialties, the TSGE Board remains worried what changes might result from physicians' ability to bill out of network. Given that physicians have limited leverage with the health plans currently, how might a ban on out of network billing further erode that leverage?

TMA and its specialty societies, including TSGE have been in discussion about acceptable legislative solutions to this issue. TMA's House of Delegates will be discussing these proposals at its Spring Conference in late April. Stay tuned for more on this developing issue.

Sunset Review of the Texas Medical Board

Every 12 years, each state agency in Texas is required to go through a review process by the Texas Sunset Commission. The Commission reviews the agency to determine if it is meeting its core functions and to make recommendations to the legislature for improvements. Every agency in Texas has a sunset date, meaning that the agency is set for termination unless the legislature proactively passes legislation reauthorizing that agency.

The Texas Medical Board is scheduled for Sunset this cycle. Currently, the Sunset Commission is reviewing the core functions of the Board with a keen eye towards the licensure and disciplinary processes of the TMB. The Commission will also be reviewing the TMB's response to emerging issues, including

- Use of telemedicine in Texas
- The prescribing of opioids by physicians.

In order to reauthorize an agency, the legislature must pass a piece of legislation. This legislation is a bill like any other bill and is subject to amendment at any step of the process. Since the entire practice act is open for amendment, organized medicine must be very cognizant and alert to how potential changes might impact our practices and scope of practices. The Sunset Commission will issue its report this summer; stay tuned.

Emerging Issues: Fiscal health of the state of Texas

The outlook for the State's fiscal picture does not appear to be very positive. The downturn in the Texas oil and gas economy has weakened the state's overall revenue. Texas is facing many uncertain revenue and appropriations challenges. Those of us that provide services in the Medicaid program know that physicians have not received a significant bump in reimbursements in a generation. These uncertain financial times do not bode well for new Medicaid rates; in fact, the conventional wisdom in Austin is we may need to be on guard for cuts.

<https://www.texastribune.org/2016/03/31/lawsuits-oil-prices-could-spell-budget-doomsday/>

Your TSGE Board always welcomes your feedback and input on these and any other issues you believe are important to our specialty and our patients. Please feel free to contact me directly or the TSGE Headquarters with any comments

As your President, I encourage you to reach out to local candidates by inviting them to your clinics or hosting them for coffees. Our ability to share the stories of our patients and the work our profession is doing in the community is our greatest resource. Be a key contact and voice for TSGE!

TSGE Website enhancement

As I have reported in my last message, we have added another feature to the TSGE website. You can now access contact information for your colleagues who are TSGE members. This information is for members only and requires a login. If you would like to opt out, please contact Ky Camero at the TSGE office.

TSGE Membership

I am sure you know somebody who is not member of TSGE!!

There are many reasons to join--personally and professionally. TSGE gives you the opportunity to receive quality education along with CME at the Annual Program. It gives you representation at the state capital and with national organizations. TSGE also gives you the opportunity to network and share information with other gastroenterologists. Each member is an essential part to the success of TSGE—one united voice for gastroenterology.

Encourage your colleagues who might not yet be members to join TSGE.

If you have any questions or concerns, call our administrative office at 512-370-1626, or please e- mail Ky Camero at Ky.Camero@texmed.org.

Harish Gagneja, MD, AGAF, FASFE, FACG
TSGE President