Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Springtime has descended on Texas and the Bluebonnets (and allergies) have been in full bloom! This legislative session has been quite active from a healthcare standpoint and your Society has been at the vanguard of advocacy efforts protecting the House of Medicine.

42nd Annual Texas Meeting

We at TSGE are busy preparing for our next Annual Texas meeting. Our program co-directors Dr Paresh Mehta and Dr. Zarema Singson with the help of the educational committee have put together a wonderful program and I encourage you to visit the TSGE website (tsge.org) soon for a sneak peek to take a look. In addition to a great educational conference, TSGE is proud to present Texas Live happening on Friday afternoon. More information about both programs will be available soon.

Mark your calendars for the 42nd Annual Texas Program, September 22-24 at the Marriott Rivercenter in San Antonio, TX.

Texas Legislative Update

As of this writing there are less than 30 days left in the 140-day 85th Texas Legislative Session. Tensions at the Capitol remain high as legislators try to finalize a state budget and deal with a myriad of controversial issues. Healthcare related issues remain a focal point this session, including several TSGE priorities.

Step Therapy/Fail First Reform

As physicians, we are all too aware of the challenges our patients face when they try to obtain the drugs we prescribe. Often, managed care companies require our patients to ‘fail-first’ on drugs other than the specific medication we prescribe. In essence, the managed care companies turn our prescription pads into ‘suggestion pads’.

Two bills have been filed this session to infuse transparency and due process into this practice; SB 680 by Sen. Kelly Hancock and HB 1464 by Rep. Greg Bonnen. Currently, both bills have passed out of the House Committee of Insurance with the next step being deliberation of the senate bill on the house floor. We are optimistic the final bill will go to the governor for signature.

Reforming the ABIS Maintenance of Certification (MOC)

As President of TSGE, no single issue has generated more opinion with our members than the MOC. Several states have passed versions of a bill that prohibits the exclusive use of MOC for licensure by a state medical board, privileges with a hospital, or credentials with a managed care company.
Texas is attempting to follow in those states’ footsteps with SB 1148 by Sen. Dawn Buckingham and HB 3216 By Rep. Greg Bonnen. Both of these legislators are physicians and understand, all too well, how use of the MOC has spiraled out of control.

SB 1148 is the bill that has moved out of its first committee and has been passed in the Senate. It is currently pending deliberation by the full House. Rep. Bonnen is very committed to advancing this legislation in the House. TSGE is committed to lifelong learning, not lifelong testing by a national vendor. Along with the TSGE, the ACG is keeping a watchful eye on this piece of legislation and is helping with a grassroots campaign.

Out-of-Network Balanced Billing

For several years now, legislative efforts across the nation have been deliberated and passed to curb ‘surprise medical bills’ received by patients. Texas has not been immune from these efforts and Organized Medicine has been on guard for those who want to prevent physicians from being rightfully paid for services delivered and not reimbursed by the managed care companies. Organized Medicine was fearful that efforts in other states that set physicians’ prices in statute or completely ban out-of-network work billing would be offered here in Texas. Despite initial misgivings about this topic this session, only one bill has advanced, SB 507 by Sen. Hancock.

This legislation builds upon existing mediation processes afforded to patients when an amount in dispute is above $500. Organized Medicine currently supports SB 507 as a patient-friendly process to resolve disputes involving third party payments.

You can track these bills and others online at http://www.capitol.state.tx.us

TSGE is active on other fronts as well. As your President, I know that your Board is open to feedback and suggestions about these and other legislative initiatives.

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.

Jay Yepuri, MD

TSGE President