

Beware alternate funding plans

To the editor:

The introduction of salaried positions in community hospitals will change emergency medicine. Until recently, physicians practised autonomously under a fee-for-service (FFS) payment scheme. Now, for the sake of a short-term pay raise, many physicians are jumping to alternate funding plans (AFPs). But under an AFP, group dynamics will change and independence will be lost.

Governments and hospital administrators will monitor productivity. Physicians below the standard will be singled out and, presumably, dealt with. Under FFS, hard-working physicians are rewarded, but under an AFP they will subsidize slower moving physicians — a situation that will lead to frustration and decreasing productivity. Within AFPs, money earned by individuals would be controlled by and directed to others. For example, groups could divert clinical funds to educational activities, whether or not all members of the group actually require or benefit from those activities. Under this scheme, harder-working physicians would fund a disproportionate amount of the cost. In the future, groups may decide to divert clinical funds to other activities, further eroding hard-earned incomes.

AFPs look like a sweet deal to some, but we should consider what is being offered and at what cost. Our government's main goal is to control costs, not to give emergency physicians a raise. AFP contracts rarely cover expenses for management and shadow billing, for additional coverage during busy pe-

riods, or other group expenses. When family physicians see their patients in the ED these funds are subtracted from the ED's AFP income. In one Ontario centre, this factor reduced payments to emergency physicians by \$300 000 within a \$1.2 million contract and led to a much lower pay rate than specified in the AFP contract.

The group economics associated with AFPs raise other difficult issues. Should all in the emergency medicine group have equal voting power regardless of hours worked, patients seen or income generated? What are the penalties for tardiness, long lunch breaks and poor productivity? Should people with different skills, experience and work ethics be paid equally? Will AFPs kill motivation and make physicians regress toward the lowest common denominator?

Let's look before we leap.

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Emergency physicians and death certificates

To the editor:

I was disturbed by the authors' response¹ to Dr. Jim Gall's letter² regarding their article.³ The authors acknowledge that they work in an institution "that routinely contacts the coroner for all ED pronouncements." They further admit that this practice was not changed despite efforts by the regional coroner's office to emphasize "the need for emergency physicians to complete the death certificate and to call the coroner's office only when the death met certain criteria." This request is de-

scribed as "adding responsibility and more paperwork" and "must be weighed against competing service and academic demands."

Ontario, like most jurisdictions, has a statutory obligation to report certain deaths, such as those that are the result of trauma or medical misadventure. In the absence of the statutory criteria, it is every attending physician's obligation to complete the death certificate and attendant institution paperwork. Indeed, our duty to our patient is not ended until the death routines (e.g., notifying relatives, completing paperwork) have been performed. We are all busy, but deaths are infrequent and important events, and our obligations should not be taken lightly. In a teaching institution, in which future trainees are looking for role models and forming habits, the completion of our statutory and moral obligations should be completed faithfully and without reluctance or regret.

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References

1. Cheung M, Morrison L, Verbeek PR. Pre-hospital vs. ED pronouncement of death [letter]. CJEM 2001;3(3):177-81.
2. Gall J. Prehospital vs. ED pronouncement of death [letter]. CJEM 2001;3(3):177.
3. Cheung M, Morrison L, Verbeek PR. Pre-hospital vs. emergency department pronouncement of death: a cost analysis. CJEM 2001;3(1):19-25.

[The authors respond:]

Dr. Ovens reminds us to strive to live up to the responsibilities of a complete physician against the adversity of the hectic climate in which we work. To do

so would be in keeping with the best academic role model and performance benchmark. Our study and our observations are based on the reality of our institution and the demands of our department. In no way do we suggest the performance benchmark for legal documentation should be lowered. In clinical practice the legal responsibilities of complete documentation must always be weighed against the other time sensitive responsibilities of being a clinician. In comparison, there are no mea-

asurable performance standards for time spent with a grieving family and incident debriefing of paramedical and emergency staff. As academic clinicians we strive to balance our responsibilities and the making of choices under the pressures inherent in our specialty. This personal triage of where to spend our time is also an important opportunity to role model for trainees. We cannot be all things to all people and we make choices not with regret or reluctance but with a feeling that we

have put the patient, their family, our staff and our trainees first.

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9th International Conference on Emergency Medicine

June 17–21, 2002 — Edinburgh Free Paper and Poster Presentations Call for Submissions

The 9th International Conference on Emergency Medicine will be held from June 17th to 21st in Edinburgh, Scotland. CAEP has been allotted 16 Free Paper presentations of a 15 minutes duration, and 35 Poster presentations. The topics of the Free Papers and Posters can be related to any topic of interest in Emergency Medicine and should reflect original research or new academic programs.

The Free Paper presenters will be given a \$300 stipend by CAEP to contribute toward their travel costs to or in Edinburgh. There are, unfortunately, no stipends for the Poster presentations. Individuals are encouraged to send proposals for both Free Paper and Poster presentations to the CAEP office.

A working group from the Board will review the proposals. Acceptance will be based on originality, interest, and relevance to Emergency Medicine. Consideration will be given to CAEP members only.

Proposals for Free Papers and Posters must reach the CAEP office no later than **1700 hr, EST, November 30, 2001**. Fax and email submissions will be accepted. All applicants will be notified of the decision by January 8, 2002. Proposals must be no more than two (2) pages of single-spaced text. The Free Paper text must be ready for publication, as they will be sent to the ICEM in January 2002. A summary abstract should also be included. The abstract must contain: Introduction, Methods, Results and Conclusions. The maximum length is 300 words. Provide your institutional affiliation and city.

Stipends will be paid out after the conference.

For further information, contact the CAEP Office.

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