

# The New Frontier of Health Care

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**H**old on to your seats, grab the handrail, clench your teeth, and close your eyes tightly because the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) (also referred to as Obamacare) has begun. Officially, the registration portals for health insurance exchanges opened on October 1.

Will it be the best of times, or will it be the worst of times? At this stage, no one really knows, as the details of the PPACA have not yet been finalized. It seems we have to wait until the law is implemented to know what is covered and what is not.

Dermatologists—medical, surgical, or aesthetic—will certainly see an impact. The challenge is learning exactly what that impact will be, how it will affect a particular type of practice, how long it will last, and how to prepare for it. The main question is, what do we do now?

For starters, I suggest nothing. Let me explain. Do nothing to change the successful interaction and exchanges you have with your patients and their families. Do nothing to change the quality of care you provide in your practice. Do nothing to alter your approach to your profession.

Do be aware. Realize that change is all around us in terms of who will be paying physicians, how much we will be allowed to charge for our services, and which patients qualify for particular procedures or prescriptions. Understand that you are not alone, as all of us in the house of medicine are affected.

Be alert. Stay tuned to communications from professional societies, organizations, associations, and academies. Recognize that they exist to help you deal with the world around you. If you are not a member of your local, state, and/or national organizations, it may be time to consider joining. There is power in numbers, and solace too.

Be reassuring. Let your patients know that you will do your best to continue to take care of them, especially seniors who have so much concern. Explain to your staff that changing employment conditions, labor laws, insurance regulations, and benefit requirements are beyond anyone's control and that you will continue to do your best to take care of them as you always have. Share with your family members and loved ones that you will continue to work hard at your profession to be the best that you can be, and that you will do what is necessary to maintain your professionalism and leadership. Offer your colleagues guidance if they seek it and support those in need. Encourage leaders who are defending our patients and our interests.

Be happy that you are in the field of dermatology, one of the few specialties of medicine that has successfully diversified itself economically, and do not worry about preparing for tomorrow's changes. Understand that there is not so much of a divide between disease and desire in dermatology, though funding sources are diametrically opposed. As the field of dermatology prepares for the future of medicine, dermatologists will undoubtedly continue to be held in the highest esteem by our colleagues as having made the wisest choice in our career decision.

Finally, be calm. The world of medicine is not crashing down around you, though many would have you believe that it is imminent. As to whether it is on a slow-motion death spiral (as many contend), only time will tell. Certainly, our course and direction are changing, but the destination is not yet determined. Perhaps the best description is borrowed from *Star Trek*: "Mr. Sulu, take us to warp speed. What is our heading Captain? That way, Sulu, out there (finger pointing), where no one has gone before."

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