

Chapter Eight
Memories of AAMC National Meetings: M. Siegel

Looking back over a career that has spanned almost forty-five years in academic medical center business and finance, some of my fondest memories relate to the AAMC annual meetings.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that this provided an opportunity to leave the daily routine of balancing the budget, and try to solve the plethora of other problems we were presented each day, and go off to another city where we could meet with our colleagues from other parts of the country.

These meetings were always very stimulating and thought provoking. They gave us an opportunity to learn what was happening in Washington and other parts of the country and to listen to some very interesting speakers.

One meeting in particular will always remain in my memory.

This was the 1970 meeting at the Palmer House in Chicago.

The plenary session the first morning looked very interesting. The speakers included, Edgar F. Kaiser, Chairman of the Board of Kaiser Industries, Walter P. Reuther, President, United Auto Workers, Dr. John T. Dunlap, Professor of Economics at Harvard University and The Honorable Joseph L. Alioto, Mayor the city of San Francisco.

Mr. Kaiser reviewed the history of the Kaiser/Permanente Health Care System. When his grandfather, Henry Kaiser, first introduced the concept of an HMO system to provide health care to a large population, the skeptics said it would never work. He proved them wrong. This system provided high quality health care at reasonable cost to a large patient population in Hawaii and California.

Mr. Reuther began by chiding Mr. Kaiser (a close friend) for refusing his request to establish a Kaiser HMO program in Detroit, Michigan for the UAW. He said that the answer from Mr. Kaiser was that the accountants at his company determined that this population was not suitable for HMO-type coverage and the plan would not be financially viable.

He spoke about the problem of obtaining quality health care for the members of his union at a reasonable cost and predicted that eventually they would be covered by an HMO-type system. [*]

[*] Tragically, a few weeks later Mr. Reuther was killed in a plane crash.

Dr. Dunlap discussed some facets of the economics of health care delivery.

Mayor Alioto's talk was titled: "How High a Priority Health Care."

The speakers seemed to agree that as the cost of health care in the United States approached 12% of total gross national product it would be more and more difficult to provide the type of high quality health care that most Americans expected and deserved, and at the same time, begin to solve the problem of providing quality health care to the millions of Americans who were not covered by private or government insurance.

The message presented by these speakers proved to be very prophetic.

Another highlight of each national meeting has been The Alan Gregg Memorial Lecture.

That year the lecture was presented by Dr. Kingman Brewster, Jr., President of Yale University. His talk, "The University and the Community."

Mr. John M. Russell, immediate Past President of the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation, was chosen to be the recipient of the Twelfth Annual Abraham Flexner Award, for Distinguished Service to Medical Education.

The third plenary session began with the honorable, Roger O. Egeberg, Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, discussed, and "The Federal Government's View of the Issues."

Next, Dr. Robert H. Ebert, Dean, Harvard Medical School, reported on "The Impact on Medical Schools of New Methods of Financing Medical Care."

Dr. Anreas Querio, Academisch Ziekenhuis Dijkzigt, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, shared "Experiences with New Directions in Medical Education in Holland."

Dr. Philip P. Anderson, Assistant Dean and Associate Professor of Dermatology, University of Missouri School of Medicine, outlined "Limits on Innovation in Medical Curriculum."

Dr. E. Harvey Estes, Jr., Professor and Chairman, Department of Community Health Sciences, Duke University School of Medicine, explored, "Potential for Newer Classes of Personnel."

Dr. James A. Hecker, Instructor in Pediatrics, University of Colorado School of Medicine, described, "The Pediatric Nurse Practitioner and the Child Health Associate."

No wonder, from that point on, I looked forward to the annual AAMC meeting as one of the highlights of the year.

As the year's went by there were so many outstanding speakers at the annual meetings, I will mention only a very few that stand out in my memory.

At the October 29, 1971 plenary session, Elliot Richardson, Secretary of the Department of Health Education and Welfare, spoke about, "Meeting The Nation's Health Manpower Needs."

He began, "Having worked closely with the Association of American Medical Colleges in the development of a Federal health manpower strategy, it is a pleasure to participate in the first plenary session of this annual meeting."

He said, "This administration will judge alternative solutions to the nations health problems by their comparative effectiveness in achieving a fundamental Federal objective. This objective is to promote the opportunity for all Americans to lead healthy lives, regardless of where we live, our economic status, or any racial, social, physical or environmental barrier that would prevent us from achieving our full health potential."

At the same meeting, a few days later, Senator Edward Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Health Subcommittee of the Labor and Public Welfare Committee, spoke about, "Health Care in the Seventies".

He began by talking about a trip taken by him and members of his subcommittee. They visited several countries in Europe, "in order to gain insights as to how it has been possible for these countries to make more progress in bringing decent health care to their citizens than it has been for us."

He continued: "All of this activity would not be required if this country were not in the midst of a profound health care crisis, but it is in such a crisis. And I believe we must face that crisis and understand that crisis if we are ever to cure it. We must be able to face the reality that America's health care system has grown rigid and lethargic. It has become so inefficient, so irrational, so inward looking, so inequitable, and so parochial that we can no longer expect it to cure itself. That is why I believe we must open the system up and thereby make it possible for all of those who are affected by the system to participate in its reform."

I think that attending these meetings and listening to talks presented by so many distinguished leaders, political and academic, that I returned to the University of Miami feeling very proud to be part of such an important segment of American society. I felt that it was important to work as hard as possible to make even a very small contribution, to the issues discussed at these meetings.

