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Presidential Address — September 20, 2011

Distinguished guests, 50-year honorees, fellow councilors, members of the Academy, colleagues, staff, family, and friends, I am honored and humbled to be standing here tonight in the position as the next president of the Academy of Medicine — an academy 155 years rich in history, honor, ethics, and action.

What amazing foresight our founding physicians had to establish such a society passed down to all of us.

Just to add some perspective, the year the Academy of Medicine was chartered the first railroad bridge was completed over the Mississippi River, it was the birth year of Sigmund Freud and Woodrow Wilson, and Gregory Mendel had just begun his research on Mendelian genetics. It was the same year that the Pottawatomie and Grattan Native American massacres occurred, and it was four years before Lincoln became our 16th president.

Nine years ago, two members of my surgical group faced a career ending threat. Up to that point in my career I had never been a political person. I focus on my practice, patient care issues; sure I held medical staff positions on various committees, surgical department and executive committee positions, as a duty to my fellow medical staff, but never on a broader stage than that.

The threat to my partners was a lawsuit surrounding a case with an unfortunate, yet unavoidable, outcome that led to an award that was incomprehensible. This came at the time of the worst malpractice/liability crisis this community and state ever faced with the combination of escalating premiums, awards and damages out of control, increasing trivial and frivolous lawsuits that were so irresponsible that many could have been labeled nothing short of attempts at extortion.

If my two partners had been in solo practice they would have been uninsurable, as a part of our group they were offered a special premium rate of \$190,000 per year as a

sign of good faith to our group from our carrier. Wow what a sweet deal, obviously unsustainable, with those economics, they faced the cold reality of having to quit medicine, two excellent, seasoned, respected, skilled surgeons stripped from the pool of talent available to our community.

At that time we needed organized strong influential help, and we turned to the Academy of Medicine. Through the Academy's organized efforts, including a television exposé, we fought back. My partners became the poster children for what would become a local battleground for tort reform, awaking the public and physicians to the crisis and rousing the Academy to what would become part of a major grassroots effort that swept Ohio leading to our current tort reforms, the eventual changed makeup of the state supreme court justices, a total change in the climate of malpractice insurance and liability in this state, affecting rates with more healthy competition among carriers, and clearly impacting the lottery mentality that had resulted in the runaway awards and number of frivolous suits filed. It was early in that time frame that Don Nofziger called me into action by asking me to run for Council ... what an example of the change that can occur with organization.

Successes of the Academy, there are many in its long history. Just in the past ten years the Academy of Medicine has made an impact in the fight for local recruitment and retention of physicians, with funding and influence on the Cincinnati MD Resource Center, and by bringing the shortage to the public's awareness.

There have been efforts with the prompt payment bill law, the Academy's role with the lawsuit filed against the four major health insurance companies is well documented, and from that the resultant victories for physicians as well as the creation of the Doctors Foundation, which serves as a benefactor for many physician and patient causes including a role in AF4Q in the design and implementation of quality care initiatives in Cincinnati.

Due to the Academy of Medicine efforts along with the OSMA, Anthem reversed its blended rate coding policy, and the support and prestige of the Academy has given backbone to the EMT disaster response guideline protocols, the list goes on and on ... To one of our current efforts, Project Access ... designed to impact the uninsured patient population in our community with PCP, specialists, hospitals, and pharmacists all partnering to work towards cost effective quality care, proactive care rather than reactive care.

The relevance of the Academy has always been its ability to act for not only its physician members but all community physicians in times of crisis. As the late Dr Robert Heidt, Sr. stated last year at this annual meeting “The Academy has been the public voice of physicians in Cincinnati.”

We are now faced with what may well be the most difficult challenge in the Academy’s history, the challenge to adapt and survive.

The gradual shifting and changing of practice patterns with the increasing intrusions into the traditional model of private practice, the expansion of different physician roles, hospital-owned practices, the emergence of global payment, the fear of the unknowns of the federal health care plan, the general disengagement of physicians. It feels to me like a loss of identity and prestige of our profession. There is clearly a loss of autonomy with the increasing governmental and insurance regulations, the current restriction of residency hours with talk of extending that to physicians in practice.

We are just one spoke in a wheel of an industry that is rolling out of control, and from my perspective, government, business, insurers, all seem to have forgotten that we are the providers of health care, health care that has always been able to be rendered in a collegial relationship with hospital institutions with the partnership of a myriad of health care professionals. Our position in that pyramid of care is in jeopardy. The business and the art of medicine have changed.

I hear my colleagues say why should I join the Academy ... Let me just read a few headlines I have clipped out of medical magazines and our local paper over the past three weeks ...

- * The Hippocratic Myth: Why Doctors are under pressure to ration care, practice politics, and compromise their promise to heal

- * Physicians face 29.5% Medicare pay cut by Jan 1 2012

- * How debt ceiling deal could squeeze Medicare physician pay even more

- * 18% in Ohio lack medical coverage

- * Medicaid payments delayed

Just this past week in our *Cincinnati Enquirer*

- * Study concludes doctors in US out earn doctors in other countries

And just today

- * Medicare unveils bundled payment models to start in 2012

If these issues cannot captivate and engage our colleagues then hopefully the idea that if the Academy does not survive, if it ceases to have strength which comes from whom it represents, if it is not there to rise up and fight on the forefront of issues, then our profession will fracture and fail under the weight of these changes and the damage to the profession we love will be irreversible.

I thank you for your trust in me in this leadership role. Our founding physicians of the Academy of Medicine had marvelous vision in establishing this great political, ethical and social professional organization for the benefit of all physicians.

I am surrounded by tremendous talent with my fellow councilors. Our task, our duty is to reinvent the Academy, continue to energize our colleagues, to find a way to remain relevant to the ever-widening and diverging interests that influence the profession of medicine. We will not survive alone; hopefully we can embrace the necessary changes and flourish together.