

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
February, 2010

I apologize for taking a short hiatus from writing my President's messages over the holidays. However, this did not mean we did not continue taking care of the business of our Association during this time. In fact, there is quite a bit of news to report to the membership at this time, so I hope you take a moment to read this brief letter and to give input on anything you wish to discuss further.

Three major items of interest occurred over the holidays. First there was a long awaited meeting between the ArPTA and the BCBS leadership. Second, we had our second annual Strategic Planning Meeting for the ArPTA BOD and accomplished a great direction for our Component over the next year. Finally, the Health Reform Legislation has been put on temporary hold at our Nation's capital and we have discussed the ramifications of this to PT here in the State of Arkansas and also across our Nation.

We started the year on a positive note as we were granted a meeting with the leadership of BCBS of Arkansas. We came with a full agenda and the BCBS leadership team came with lots of researched information to also share with us. The persons present were Bill Phillips (our ArPTA lobbyist and a former BCBS employee), Dr. Al Thomas who is the Associate Medical Director of BCBS of Arkansas, Dr. Hayes who is the Medicare Medical Director, and I. Included in the agenda was discussion of the payment policy for home health, which presently excludes PTA payments, the benefits of the direct access to PT that is paid for by BCBS in Arkansas, the overutilization of services offered by physical therapy in Arkansas, the institution of larger co-pays for PT services now being done in Arkansas, and the problems associated with physician-owned physical therapy services in Arkansas and around the US.

We came toward good common ground in the meeting and I will summarize some of the action. First, BCBS has a set policy that no PTA will be paid for services rendered unless there is a PT in the building where the services are rendered (general supervision). We understood this policy but mentioned the differences in the home health setting. They will be willing to contemplate a change in policy if we can find an access to services issue due to this policy (which I believe we can do). We will be starting a research project to find this data in this first quarter of 2010. Second, we wanted to strongly support and encourage continuation of the payments for PT direct access in Arkansas and BCBS will be looking into getting us statistics on the cost effectiveness of this policy so we can use these nationally. Third, we all agreed there is a problem with overutilization of PT services in Arkansas including seeing patients too frequently or for too long without purpose. Part of this discussion also included the poor documentation found in many of BCBS's reviewed PT notes. We agreed to help them with this problem including educating the review staff on what is expected in documentation, when they can see someone is being seen too much, and how they can measure progress and outcomes. We will also come up with and initiate a proposal to become the BCBS tertiary reviewer within the next six months. Fourth, we discussed how high co-pays cause patients to not avail themselves to services of a PT and therefore do not always return to full function and BCBS agreed to look into this practice and the ramifications. Finally, BCBS also sees a problem with POPTS and will look at ways to measure this issues scope in our State and work on ways to

eliminate any abuse. We thought the meeting was very positive on both sides and have already set up some future contact to continue discussion and follow through on our suggested actions. Your BOD came up with a very positive strategic plan that will be implemented immediately. This plan will be posted in the next newsletter for your review so we will not discuss fully here. However, I would like to list our action items for the beginning of this year so you will all know what the ArPTA is doing for the members. We will accomplish the following:

- *Research survey for the BCBS on Home Health Coverage*
 - *Need to show if there is a group of people not accessing care due to non-payment of PTA*
- *3-4 educational courses for regions of State starting with Eldorado in May, 2010*
- *Creation of a utilization review course for third party payer reviewers*
- *Creation of a utilization tertiary review agency contract for third party payers*
- *Exportation of the APTA Brand to the Arkansas PT community*
- *Support of the Stanley Paris "S1" Course and legal consultation for the same to be presented March 22-26, 2010*
 - *Evening ArPTA social on Thursday, March 25 with cocktails and munchies*
- *PAC support of political candidates running for office*
- *Support of members and students in travel or registration to National Meetings*
- *PAC growth to > \$10,000*
- *Develop at least one more direct access third party payers*
- *Regular creation of "The Ark" newsletter and send to members with one issue to all licensees*
- *Continued contact with BCBS, Qual Care, and United to discuss reimbursement issues*

Our State elected Federal legislators have had their hands full over the past year. Whether we agree with their actions or not, there has been much discussion. It seems with the recent election in Massachusetts, the Health Reform package is temporarily stalled. As some of you might be cheering, there is a negative side of this for all of us. Included in both of these bills were an extension of the exemption process for the Medicare Cap and other important legislative initiatives concerning Medicare Direct Access. We need to be talking to our State elected Representative and Senators to let them know the importance of these issues to us and that immediate action must be taken. We have, and will continue to have, discussion with all of our elected representatives on the issues we feel should be addressed in any health reform legislation forthcoming.

The ArPTA executive staff and Board of Directors are here to serve our membership in any way. We are always looking forward to your input, even in the form of complaints, to help direct us in our actions and to instruct us on your priorities. Take some time to write to me at sforbush@uca.edu or our Executive Director through our web page www.ArPTA.org if you have anything on your mind that we need to know. We are here because of you and for you.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven W. Forbush, PT

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Arkansas Physical Therapy Association President