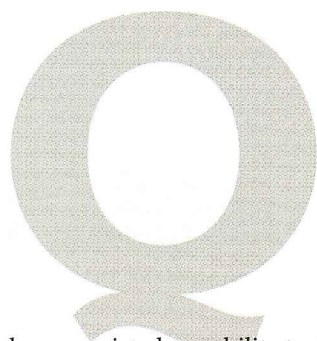


Opinion

BY RICHARD P. MILLS, MD, MPH

The Surgical Scope Fund: Have You Stepped Up to the Plate?



Quite a number of us claim to be apolitical. Does this include you? I can attest that the apolitical ophthalmologists I know are talented and respected clinicians. How can they hold this view in spite of obvious evidence that legislatures and regulatory bodies

have restricted our ability to deliver quality care? Some say they have been burned by political involvement. Some prefer to avoid conflict, on general principle. Some admit to being unwittingly apathetic, too busy with patient care to react to political events. Whatever the reason, most justify their position by saying that they provide excellent patient care, have neither the time nor the inclination to become politically involved and prefer to leave advocacy to those who are "better at it."

If this describes you, let me first assure you that I respect your position. I understand that no amount of ranting and raving will change your views. But I know that you are feeling guilty. Yes, beneath the veneer of being apolitical often lies a guilt, a kind of unease that patients might be better off individually because of your expert care, but collectively worse off because of your political indifference.

How could patients be hurt by political inaction? When legislatures authorize surgery by other than fully trained surgeons, the patients will suffer. Has it happened? Yes, in Oklahoma, where optometrists may perform surgical procedures as defined by the optometry

board, at its sole discretion. Can Oklahoma's OD intrusion into medicine be stopped? Can other states be convinced that Oklahoma's action is an isolated anomaly? Yes to both, but only if we wage expensive political battles on behalf of our patients.

Enter the Surgical Scope Fund, created by the Academy to supplement local funding in states facing imminent threats to quality surgical patient care. In the few years since its inception, it has been remarkably successful. In 14 states, optometric surgery initiatives have been defeated. Other states have received help with regulatory battles. Even if your state is not among those helped so far, you could be next, and the Fund will be there for you in your time of need.

In fact, the Surgical Scope Fund has been an essential component of the "Surgery by Surgeons" campaign that rallied support of the nation's veterans organizations. The Result? The VA reversed its directive on laser eye surgery by optometrists.

A donation to the Surgical Scope Fund requires no time out of the office, so even the busiest ophthalmologist can participate. Donations to the fund are

not subject to campaign disclosure laws, since the funds are not used for political contributions. Thus, donors and their contribution amounts are not disclosed. So ophthalmologists worried about their referral sources can still advocate for their patients. Corporations may contribute as well, though the donations are not tax-deductible. And finally, for the apolitical, sending a lot of money is a great way to assuage guilt.

If you are in a position to contribute \$1,000, \$2,500, \$5,000 or \$10,000, and do so today, you need no longer feel guilty. But even a dollar a day (\$365) for a year will be appreciated. Send donations to Surgical Scope Fund, American Academy of Ophthalmology, P.O. Box 45568, San Francisco, CA 94145.



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