

Business Staff

Thomas J. Gangemi, *President/Publisher*
Dendrite, Inc. *Circulation Management Services*

Editorial & Design Staff

Jack Persico, *Editor-in-Chief*
Nathan Hall, *Associate Editor*
Stephen Gollomp, MD, *Medical Editor*
Ron Stender, *Art Director*

Contributing Editors

Charles Argoff, MD, *North Shore University Hospital*
Kevin Biglan, MD, *Johns Hopkins University*
Randolph W. Evans, MD, *University of Texas at Houston*
John R. Gates, MD, *University of Minnesota*
David Geldmacher, MD, *University of Virginia*
Barry Gidal, PharmD, *University of Wisconsin*
Steven Karceski, MD, *Columbia University*
David Tong, MD, *Stanford University*

Editorial Board

Harold P. Adams, MD, *University of Iowa*
Miroslav Backonja, MD, *University of Wisconsin*
Allison Brashear, MD, *Indiana University Medical Center*
Lawrence W. Brown, MD, *Children's Hospital of Philadelphia*
Jeffrey L. Cummings, MD, *University of California, Los Angeles*
Scott E. Kasner, MD, *University of Pennsylvania*
Thomas P. Leist, MD, *Thomas Jefferson University*
Leo F. McCluskey, MD, *University of Pennsylvania*
Marc Nuwer, MD, PhD, *University of California, Los Angeles*
Michael R. Sperling, MD *Thomas Jefferson University*

Practical Neurology (ISSN 1540-1367) is published monthly by Avondale Medical Publications, LLC, 630 West Germantown Pike, S. 123, Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462. BPA membership received 2002. Printed at Malvern, PA. Copyright 2005, Avondale Medical Publications, LLC. Subscriptions are \$125.00 per year.

Opinions expressed by authors, contributors, and advertisers are not necessarily those of Avondale Medical Publications, LLC, the editors, the editorial staff, or any members of the editorial board. Avondale Medical Publications, LLC is not responsible for the accuracy of medical information printed herein. Neither Avondale Medical Publications, LLC nor its staff will be responsible for any injury to persons or property resulting from ideas or products referred to in articles or advertisements herein. Acceptance of advertisements is not an approval, warranty, or endorsement of the products or services advertised. Avondale Medical Publications does not warrant or endorse the effectiveness, quality, or safety of products advertised.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to Practical Neurology c/o Avondale Medical Publications, LLC, 630 West Germantown Pike, Suite 123, Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462.

Avondale Medical Publications, LLC
Telephone: (610) 238-9052, Fax: (610) 238-9053

Editorial Correspondence

Jack Persico, Editor-in-Chief, (610) 238-9052, ext. 10
jpersico@avondalemedical.com

Advertising Queries

Tom Gangemi, President/Publisher, (610) 238-9052, ext. 11
tgangemi@avondalemedical.com

Production Queries

Ron Stender, Art Director, (610) 238-9052, ext. 24
rstender@avondalemedical.com



EDITOR'S MESSAGE

By Jack Persico, Editor-in-Chief

All It Takes is Three Chords and the Truth

After years of consistently gloomy stories about the prospects for medical malpractice reform, we finally have a success to toast: the AMA reports that Texas has turned the corner, enacting reforms that halted its medical liability crisis. Other states are on the verge of breakthroughs, but the list of states mired in malpractice muck is still growing, and nothing is being done to correct regional disparities. The medical "brain drain" across state lines is patently unfair.



It's also duplicative. Why fight the same battle 50 times? Whether through federal legislation or just better cooperation between states, we need a coherent agenda that promises state-to-state parity. Thirty years ago, Californians passed a package of sensible reforms that limited non-economic damages and reduced lawyers' incentives to pursue frivolous lawsuits. Two bills (H.R. 534 and S. 354) currently on Capitol Hill seek to emulate this model nationwide; the House version may pass but the Senate bill is probably doomed again. How can we jumpstart interest in a comprehensive solution rather than settling for piecemeal progress? As Texas's story shows, we need to get the public on board.

The prolific country music songwriter Harlan Howard, who penned over 4000 songs, said that to capture people's attention all he needed was "three chords and the truth." A simple but compelling message, candidly delivered, wins you an audience. Seems to me that a story about overworked doctors who leave town because they're afraid of going broke and a government that lets lawyers abscond with the town's money would be perfect fodder for a Harlan Howard song.

The truth is on your side, but the chords don't resonate with the public. Too many people think the medical liability crisis only matters to doctors, lawyers and sick people: if you aren't one of those three, you can tune out. That's short-sighted. We need to get the word out that the crisis has dire consequences for *everyone*. It influences the costs of the health insurance premiums employers purchase and the copays and deductibles paid by the insured. It affects Medicare/Medicaid budgets and, by extension, every US citizen, since eliminating waste and overspending would free up money for other programs or debt reduction.

Last month *JAMA* reported that 93 percent of physicians in high-liability specialties in Pennsylvania routinely practice defensive medicine, overusing imaging technology to back up their clinical diagnoses and avoiding risky procedures and patients with complex medical problems. In addition to the bloated costs this entails, it reduces quality of care and access to care for everyone. Unfortunately, when these issues are publicized, they're often subsumed into the general partisan warfare and not given a fair hearing. We need a Harlan Howard of our own.

For now, though, let's congratulate the Texas physicians who sacrificed their time and worked behind the scenes to create a better future. As Mr. Howard said in one song: "How's about three cheers for the good guys? They don't march and they don't shout, so you never read about the quiet men who are the backbone of our land." His ode was meant for more humdrum vocations than medicine, but the sentiment is the same. California did it. Texas is doing it. You can too. **PN**