



A New Year's transition and looking forward

With the New Year comes a new CEO and president of Cleveland Clinic: Dr. Toby Cosgrove stepped down at the end of 2017, and Dr. Tom Mihaljevic has stepped up.

Dr. Cosgrove took the leadership reins of the Clinic in 2004, the same year Dr. Mihaljevic joined the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery. Under Dr. Cosgrove's leadership the Clinic has grown in size, scope of practice, and international impact. His support of education has contributed enormously to the maturation of the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine, the continued successes of our sizeable postgraduate education training program, and many other activities including our CME Center and the *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*. His willingness to recognize and continue to subsidize the *Journal* as an educational vehicle, with no direct marketing intent, has permitted the *Journal* to thrive in the international medical education space as a leading purveyor of sound, practical, evidence-based medical information. I speak for our editorial staff, authors, and readers when I say, "Thank you, Toby, for your support, trust, and belief in our educational mission."

Dr. Mihaljevic is also a notable cardiothoracic surgeon, widely recognized for his skills and expertise in innovative minimally invasive and robotic-assisted cardiac valve surgery. He has returned to our Cleveland campus after several years as CEO of Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi. We welcome him back in his new role.

As Cleveland Clinic leadership undergoes an expected smooth transition, healthcare in the United States seems perpetually stuck trying to balance the response to a plethora of scientific and clinical advances, the rapid technologic changes in healthcare delivery systems, the cost-profit distribution within and external to expanding healthcare systems, and divergent social and political pressures. Advances in molecular medicine are changing the diagnosis and therapy of cancers and inflammatory diseases. Personalized precision medicine is evolving from the abstract to the tangible. Surgical advances on a true macro scale are leading to deliverable, effective treatments of the metabolic manifestations of diabetes, while microscopic, intravascular, and minimally invasive approaches are transforming the management of patients with structural and infiltrative disease. Understanding of the microbiome may well lead to better management of cardiovascular and inflammatory diseases. There have been advances in tissue scaffolding as well as gene and cell replacement techniques that may soon transform the therapy of several diseases. These advances provide cause for intellectual and clinical enthusiasm.

And yet, the environment in which we live and practice is increasingly divided and divisive socially and politically. Medicine has lost much of its luster. Burnout and early retirement are adversely affecting the physician workforce. The current model of financial support for medical education in the United States is being reevaluated, without a clear effective alternative. Costs of healthcare are rising at unsustainable

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rates, and swathes of our vulnerable, elderly, and young middle-class population are faced with serious challenges in getting and maintaining medical care because it is inaccessible and unaffordable. Even for patients of comfortable financial means, acquiring health insurance is not an activity for the weak of heart (and that weakness might be interpreted in the future as a pre-existing condition).

Who will pay for the exciting innovations I noted above, and who will deliver them? As reimbursement is shrinking, the time demands for physician electronic charting and communications with insurance companies are increasing. More physicians are employed and controlled by healthcare systems. How many will have the time and updated knowledge to discuss the appropriateness and clinical implications of these therapies between the phone calls begging for insurance company approval of coverage and payment?

As corporate taxes appear on the brink of being reduced, we can hope that this corporate financial benefit will translate to reduced drug and device costs and more affordable insurance for our more vulnerable populations. But this is not certain.

I have concerns as to how clinical science and healthcare delivery can move forward in an environment in which federal directives now prohibit our most respected federal research agencies from using such terms as “vulnerable” (populations) and “evidence-based” to justify their proposals for budgetary support for their ongoing work in population disease health and disease management.¹ Even a short time spent in the hallways or emergency rooms of any of our safety-net hospitals reveals the strain that acute and chronic illness is imposing on the social fabric of families, society, and the often underfunded infrastructure of this aspect of our healthcare system. Who will be in the position to empathetically and objectively assess the value of translating these ongoing efforts in discovery to implementation?

Basic stem cell and genetic research is also under ongoing scrutiny. There remains legitimate fear that ultimate policy decisions will not be made by fully informed scientists and ethicists. The ongoing “dialogue” in the United States around climate change and global warming does not give me confidence that our current government policy-makers are up to the task of objectively dealing with these more nuanced and emotionally charged issues, particularly while avoiding the expression of any evidence-based rationales.

In 2016, the world lost the iconic musical poet Leonard Cohen. Hopefully, he got it right when he wrote:

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in*
— “Anthem”; 1992

I and the rest of our editorial team wish you, our readers, a healthy and peaceful 2018. I am optimistic that we can all find or create at least some light.



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1. Sun LH, Eilperin J. CDC gets list of forbidden words: fetus, transgender, diversity. The Washington Post December 15, 2017.