

What We Believe About Issues  
Facing Family Physicians

A Report on Family Medicine in Pennsylvania – Vol. 1, No. 3



PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY  
OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Family physicians are trained in: pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, internal medicine, and psychiatry, as well as neurology, surgery and community medicine.



## > Scope of Practice

Family physicians' specialized training in birth-to-death care makes them ideal specialists to create, direct and maintain each patient's medical home.

Family physicians are like general contractors. Only instead of using subcontractors to build houses, family physicians work with subspecialists and other healthcare providers to build “medical homes.” For our patients, the medical home is the first place they turn to when they are sick or injured, and the one place that puts together all the pieces of their care.

In the same manner, family physicians in busy practices often rely on support from certified nurse practitioners and physician assistants – who can provide routine exams, initial assessments and treatments for common illnesses according to protocols established with their collaborating physician.

While non-physicians are trained to provide certain aspects of a patient's care, a family physician's specialized medical education and training make him or her uniquely qualified to maintain the larger view of each patient's overall health.

The PAFP closely monitors proposed changes to the scope of practice of allied health professionals to assure that all patients have access to appropriate care.

## > Medical Economics (reimbursement)

While most Pennsylvania businesses set their own prices and receive direct payment for their goods and services, family physicians generally provide healthcare services to patients through contracts with health plans.

For the most part, it is these third-party payors—Medicare, Medical Assistance and private health insurers—that set the level of reimbursement for patient care and for related costs.

The PAFP carefully monitors family physician-payor relationships for three important reasons:

- Patient care must not be put at risk by third-party policies.
- Family physicians must have flexibility within payor protocols to treat patients based on their unique needs.
- Payor credentialing and business practices must not inhibit a family physician's ability to receive timely reimbursement and maintain a viable practice.





A key component of liability is improving safety, which family physicians address through stringent continuing education and adopting system improvements like electronic health records.

## > Medical Professional Liability

Pennsylvania law requires all physicians to maintain medical professional liability insurance coverage – an unpredictable expense that has been alarmingly high for family physicians in recent years.

Since contentious battles over tort reform first erupted in the mid 1980s, family physicians have aggressively fought for measures that will protect patient rights while affording critical relief to physicians from exorbitant insurance premiums.

PAFP policy supports a liability system that is “fair, efficient and nonadversarial.”

Although we have achieved some legislative successes, the persistently high cost of medical professional liability insurance remains a deterrent to the stability and future growth of family physician practices and a threat to our patients’ access to healthcare here in Pennsylvania.

The PAFP seeks to remedy the system through:

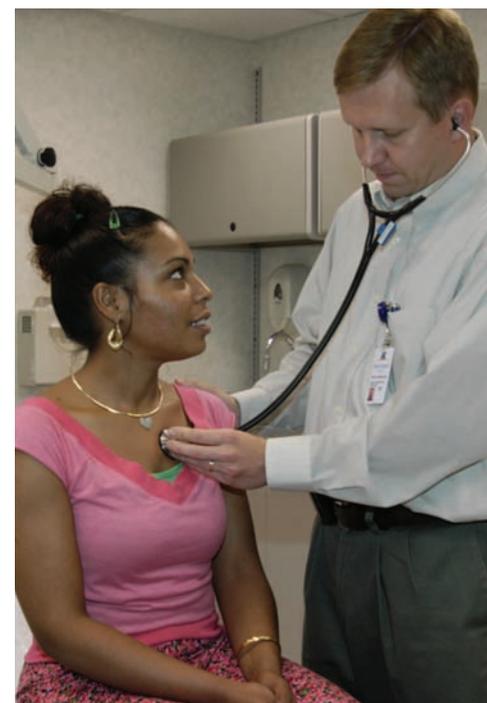
- Limiting non-economic damage payouts to create stability within the insurance market.
- Assuring fair classification and assessment of physicians for medical professional liability rates.
- Improving medical reporting and processes to reduce the risk of medical error.

## > Patient Safety

A healthier community and better quality of life for patients are at the core of a family physician’s work.

Recognizing that medical errors dramatically impact their patients, family physicians are working to incorporate systems to reduce the potential and incidence of error at every level of patient care through:

- Improved accuracy and efficiency of information exchange.
- Creation of more “evidence-based” best practices.
- Greater protections for physicians working in cooperation with the legal system on drug diversion cases.
- Streamlined communication between insurers/payors and family physicians.
- Technological advances such as electronic health records.



Need input from a Family Physician for your public health issue? Contact us at 1-800-648-5623.



## > Public Health

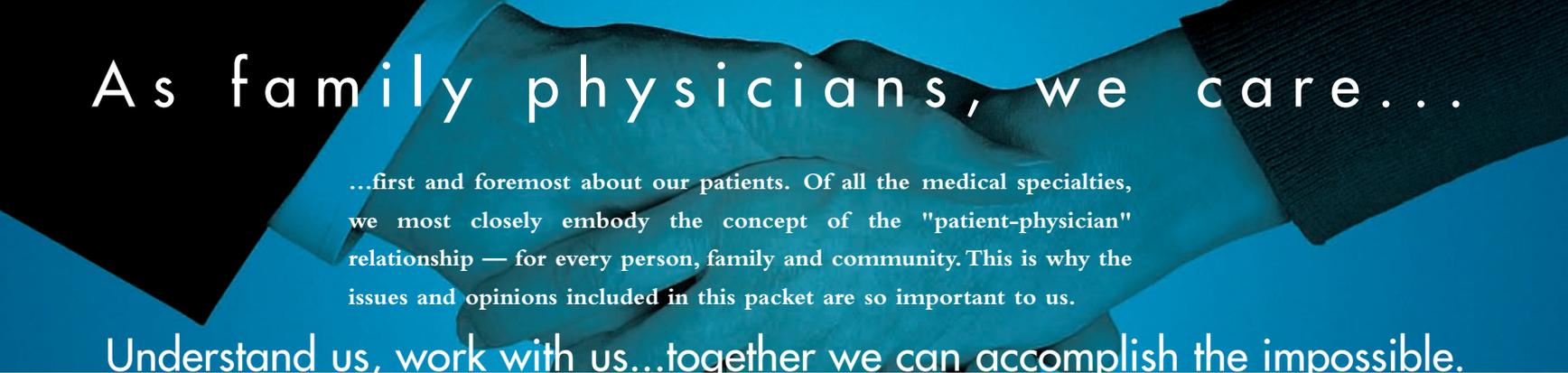
### Family physicians' "big picture" perspective puts them at the heart of public health.

A unique characteristic of Family Medicine is the way in which family physicians provide care. The patient-physician relationship – the “medical home” – immerses family physicians in the public health infrastructure. They treat patients in the context of family and community. Because family physicians are connected across all points in the healthcare system, they can direct care for patients through the public health services available through government and non-profit agencies.

Family Medicine, a medical specialty, believes that one of the priorities for healthcare reform is each person's right to a medical home. To this end, the PAFP believes the Commonwealth must maintain a strong, viable public health infrastructure, capable of responding effectively to broad areas of need, including epidemiology, emergency medical, drug and alcohol treatment and prevention, family health, community health, communicable disease, chronic disease, HIV/AIDS and public health preparedness.

Family physicians also help to shape public health. Many family physicians serve on national, state and local advisory panels and task forces working to strengthen, evaluate and coordinate public and community health initiatives. Family physicians work within public health systems, including the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Others support public health by leading or engaging in population-based research.





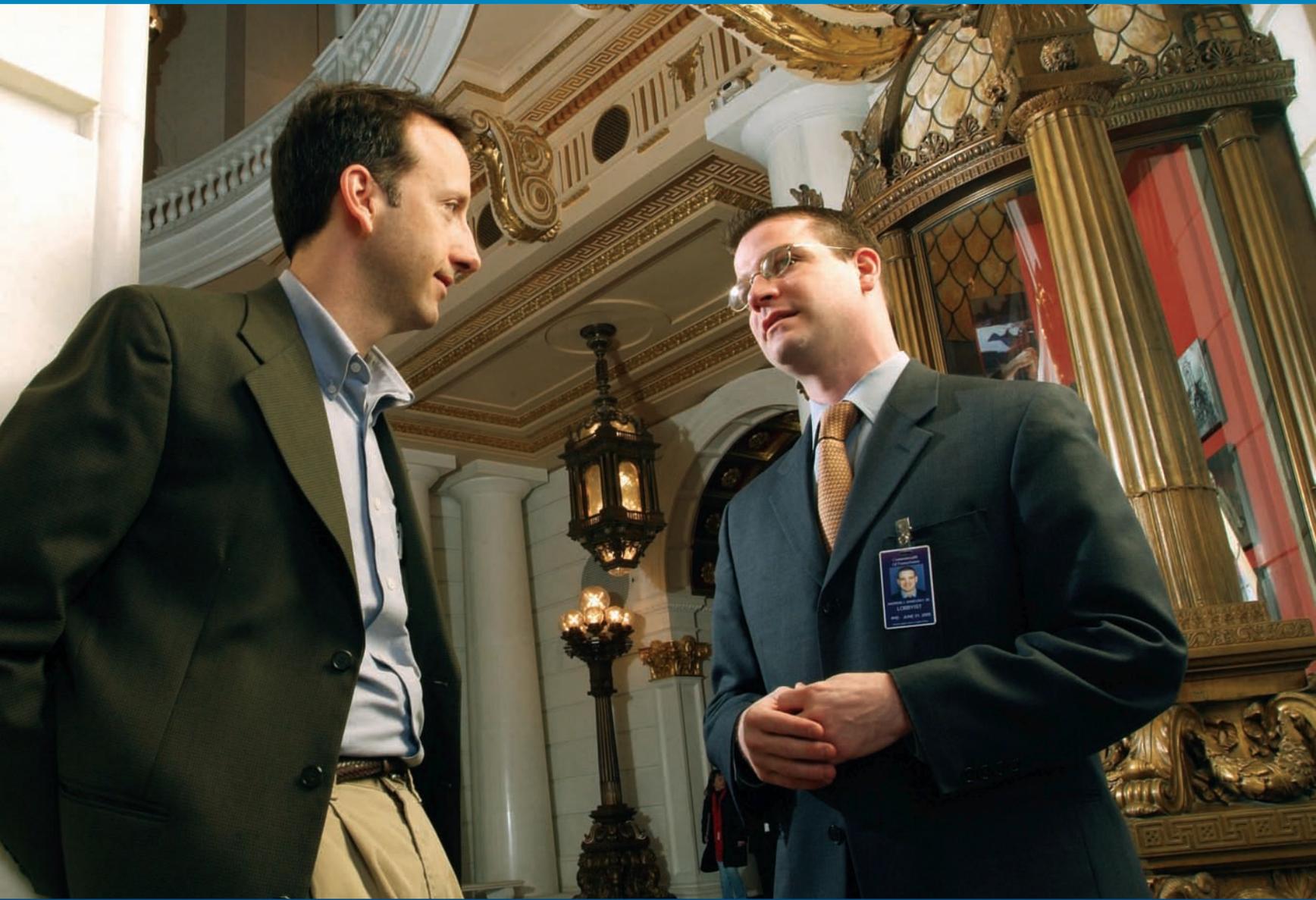
As family physicians, we care...

...first and foremost about our patients. Of all the medical specialties, we most closely embody the concept of the "patient-physician" relationship — for every person, family and community. This is why the issues and opinions included in this packet are so important to us.

Understand us, work with us...together we can accomplish the impossible.



Need a healthcare expert?  
Call us at 1-800-648-5623.



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