



# WESTCHESTER PHYSICIAN

June/July 2022

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## **PRESIDENT’S INCOMING REMARKS BRUCE MOLINELLI, MD PRESIDENT**

The following remarks were made on June 29, 2022 at the Westchester County Medical Society Annual meeting.

Thank you Dr Jacobson. His words are spot on in identifying the pressing issues we all face-- in clear and unambiguous prose.

Good evening fellow physicians, invited guests and supporters of the WCMS, I am Bruce Molinelli, a general surgeon who has been in practice for just about 30 years. I grew up in Westchester County. And after 27 years of private practice , I am now an employed physician. I have seen and felt the strains of the business side of medicine. Here I stand before you, still upright and rejuvenated. Why? ....

Well if you have ventured out of Plato's Cave, and have access to social media, you might wonder why any of us are still standing.

The steady diet of negativism flooding our daily psyche has its toll on all of us.

From the unknown of the Covid-19 pandemic to the propagation of the gun violence endemic,

From bias against race, gender, religion and culture to the extremes of genocide.

From governmental division, ineptitude or corruption to outright War.

From the images of poverty to the vice grip of addiction.

From the threat of loss of personal rights to the attack on the authenticity of science itself... not to mention the usual illness and death

Yes, it has taken its toll on all of us.... and yet.....we physicians continue to persevere... despite the extent of what we see .... and the slow erosion of our idealism.... we persevere, fueled by a conscious drive, with perhaps an unconscious purpose, to help, to mend , to cure. Perhaps we reside in a smaller and more intimate environment where we can affect a ripple of change for good at the individual level.... and it is more than likely that we succeed here.

*(Continued on page 11)*



**BRUCE MOLINELLI, MD**  
*President, WCMS*

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*FROM THE EDITOR...***TALES OF DESPAIR AND HOPE**  
**PETER ACKER, MD**

It started with a phone call and a query. My cousin was calling about her 14 year old son, Michael. "One of his legs seems bigger than the other". I'm used to getting medical questions from my various relatives and most of them end with a reassurance before settling in for a catch-up chat. It has served admirably over the years as a method for keeping up with the various doings of my far flung family. This call was different; despite my mental scurrying to come up with a list of benign, I couldn't help but focus on the more sinister. Trying to affect a reassuring tone, I advised my cousin to take him the next morning to his doctor, and then waited with bated breath. The initial news was good. Blood count and MRI were normal. But there was no good explanation for the slight but noticeable swelling of the one entire leg. Was it some rare form of congenital lymphedema just now manifesting itself? Some months passed and then the other shoe dropped. Another phone call, this one late at night. Michael had just come downstairs to show his mother some lumps that, from the description over the phone, seemed unmistakably to be inguinal lymph nodes. This time neither one of us could keep the panic out of our voices. The whole situation had been rendered even more poignant by the fact Michael's father (and my cousin's husband) had just passed away the year before from a lingering neurologic illness. The next few days were a fog of rapid consultations, radiologic studies and a bone marrow examination that culminated in the searing diagnosis of non-Hodgkins lymphoma =, stage four. Family members huddled in a room at Mt Sinai Hospital and I'll never forget my cousin's cry as I enveloped her in my arms upon entering the room.

This story has two parts and I must now digress to a scene that occurred around the same time in my pediatric office. It was a fairly typical Sunday morning with a parade of colds, minor injuries and fevers. I walked into the exam room and greeted a mother I knew quite well, having first met her and her husband at a Lamaze class some two years earlier. Both were architects, bright, enthusiastic, and just a pleasure to interact with. Now she greeted me with her typical beaming smile. I glanced at the chart and saw that her son, Ben, had a fever that had been going on for two or three days. A few questions produced answers of a routine and unalarming nature and I proceeded to my exam. The ears and throat were fine and chest sounds were clear. I ran my hand down to his belly and my hand stopped in surprise. A more careful feel and in an instant I could see the future of years of treatment and heartache. His spleen was palpable almost to his pelvis. In short order, we had him in the hospital and diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia.

My cousin Michael soldiered through multiple treatment cycles, complications, and setbacks that so frequently characterize the course of aggressively treated cancer. He missed a year of school, but despite all the emotional turmoil (age 14 if rough in the best of circumstances, he managed to succeed academically and some years later was admitted to Wesleyan College.



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## DON'T CHASE OUR PHYSICIANS OUT OF NEW YORK—OP-ED

BY PARAG MEHTA, MD

PRESIDENT

MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Not very long ago, New York's physicians and other health care workers were cheered as heroes for their efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. They risked their lives for their patients. They risked the lives of their loved ones as they provided this care.

Many physicians were sickened, and some died. Countless physicians continue to wear the emotional scars from these overwhelming circumstances.

However, the cheers are long forgotten.

Now, the physicians of New York face a potential new disaster, due to a well-intentioned—but egregiously harmful—bill recently passed by the New York State Legislature.

The recent legislation would exponentially increase the damages that are awardable under New York's wrongful death statute. One actuarial study concluded the increased damages and the new lawsuits this bill would trigger would increase liability insurance costs for New York's doctors and hospitals by nearly 40%.

Yes, 40%.

Liability costs are already an overwhelming component of the operating costs of your local hospital and doctor's office. Can you imagine how hard it would be to manage if your mortgage or rent payment went up 40%?

Even if the liability cost increases necessitated by this bill amounted to half of what has been predicted, such cost increases are untenable.

If Governor Hochul does not veto this bill, patient access and continuity of care could be threatened across the state as physicians move to other states with more physician-friendly environments or retire early to avoid the staggering new costs this bill would impose.

New York physicians already pay among the highest liability premiums in the country. Many already pay tens of thousands of dollars a year for their coverage. Those who provide the most critical emergency care essential to our safety net—including neurosurgeons, cardiac surgeons and OB-GYNs—often face costs of

\$100-200,000 per year to provide this care.

Even before COVID, New York has long received the dubious designation as one of the worst states in the country to provide care, according to wallethub.com. In addition to New York's excessive regulations, it has by far and away the highest liability costs and insurance premiums in the country.

For example, a report from Diederich Healthcare showed that in 2019, New York once again had the highest cumulative medical liability payouts of any state in the country, a whopping 68% more than the state with the second highest amount, Pennsylvania.

This is not just because of New York's size. It also had the highest *per capita* liability payment of all the State, exceeding the second highest state Massachusetts by nearly 10%.

Some in support of this legislation have argued that New York's existing wrongful death recovery law is an outlier compared to other states' laws. However, what is not mentioned is that many of these other states—more than 30—have also enacted *comprehensive provisions to contain excessive medical liability insurance costs*, including limits on damages.

It is certainly appropriate to evaluate and determine the most responsible way to address gaps in New York's liability laws. But it must be done in a responsible manner that controls the explosive increase in costs that such new lawsuits would inevitably cause.

To preserve access to our healthcare safety net, the Governor must veto this legislation and bring together various parties to discuss how best such lawsuit expansion can be achieved responsibly.

The citizens of New York need their physicians. The Governor must veto this bill so our physicians can continue to provide care to their patients.



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**STOP THE TRAIN****Elliot Barsh, MD*****“One discovers the light in darkness, that is what darkness is for;******but everything in our lives depends on how we bear the light.”****-James Baldwin*

Hi everyone.

I hope this month's newsletter finds you well.

The darkness of the pandemic has affected all of us.

No matter how much has been lost, there is more we can lose.

In medicine, more than ever before, we ***“bear the light”*** for our patients.They may want a prescription, but they need a ***companion***.Someone they can trust to be ***careful*** with their feelings and fears.Someone who will ***accept*** their grief with ***kindness*** and ***grace***.***Someone who wants to see them as much as they want to see us.***

Thanks for reading, and don't forget the video of the Emily Dickinson poem at the end.

Be safe.

E

*"But for doctors and nurses a return to a normal rhythm of work is still a long way off."***One Day in the ‘Parallel Universe’ of a London I.C.U.**

Britain's government may have lifted coronavirus restrictions, but hospital workers say the return to a normal rhythm of work is still a long way off.

*"As a physician, I have struggled to know what to make of this moment in the pandemic, and I fear that it will last a long time."***Will the Coronavirus Pandemic Ever End?***"We can be optimistic and wait for life to be what we want it to be, or make it what we hope it will be."***How Covid Stole Our Time and How We Can****Get It Back**

‘Depressing Math’ can help you live a more fulfilled life.

*"It's not that I wish the pain to remain, but smoothing it away feels unfair. My patients did not have that option."***Memorializing COVID***"I think the one thing I miss the most is feeling anything,..."***As Covid Deaths Rise, Lingering Grief Gets a New Name**

Prolonged grief disorder was recently added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, just as experts are predicting a coming wave of severe bereavement.

*We grow accustomed to the Dark —  
When Light is put away —  
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp  
To witness her Good bye —**A Moment — We Uncertain step  
For newness of the night —  
Then — fit our Vision to the Dark —  
And meet the Road — erect —**And so of larger — Darkneses —  
Those Evenings of the Brain —  
When not a Moon disclose a sign —  
Or Star — come out — within —**The Bravest — grope a little —  
And sometimes hit a Tree  
Directly in the Forehead —  
But as they learn to see —**Either the Darkness alters —  
Or something in the sight  
Adjusts itself to Midnight —  
And Life steps almost straight.**Emily Dickinson*

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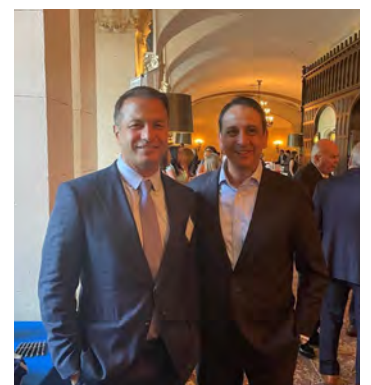
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# 2022 Annual Meeting Photos







John Lombardo, MD, CMO MLMIC—"Friend of the Society" awardee & Dr. Thomas Lee



Jeffrey Jacobson, MD, WCMS Immediate Past President & Sherlita Amler, MD, Westchester County Commissioner of Health—"Friend of Medicine" awardee

### *FROM THE EDITOR...*

#### **TALES OF DESPAIR AND HOPE**

**PETER ACKER, MD**

*(Continued from page 2)*

In the meantime, Ben underwent a similar rocky course (2 competes with 14 for the most difficult age title. His mother, Jennifer, asked many pointed and intelligent questions about his treatment and I continued to be impressed by what a quick study she was. I was even more impressed when she mention to me her plans to pursue a medical career, which for her meant first taking all the premed courses, daunting for anybody let alone fore someone carrying the burdens she was carrying. Nevertheless, I followed what seemed to be a quixotic quest with a deepening interest as she progressed from premed to MCAT preparation to medical school acceptance. She frequently had her textbooks with her when sitting next to Ben during one of his frequent hospitalizations. (Ben is now a healthy 10 year old.)

Another phone call, now from my cousin Michael. He had, in the meantime, graduated from Wesleyan and had plans to become a psychologist. To that end, he was doing an internship in preparation for graduate studies in psychology. After a brief chat and breathing a sigh of relief that this was not a medical call, he told me the reason he was contacting me. He had decided that psychology was not for him an instead: "I want to be a pediatrician like you."

Now, the denouement, fittingly coming in the form of two more phone calls just last week. The first from Michael: He was accepted to Brown Medical School. The second call was from Jennifer after she matched at Yale in pediatrics. I cannot help but feel optimistic for the future of pediatrics.



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The Westchester County Department of Health seeks an experienced physician to serve as Director of Clinical Services to oversee its team of health care professionals in leading various health programs to safeguard and promote the well-being of all the residents of Westchester County. The Department provides sexual health, TB, and immunization services including a limited service laboratory in White Plains and Yonkers.

Serving a population of close to one million residents, the Department of Health is responsible for implementing and managing Public Health programs aimed at achieving its mission to protect health, reduce environmental risks, prevent disease and promote access to care and a healthy lifestyle for people of all ages.

This physician will direct and coordinate clinical and preventive health programs of the Health Department, establish medical and clinical policies and programs, and be responsible for the delivery of public health services, clinical care and disease control programs for the Department. The incumbent will represent the Commissioner throughout the County and direct and coordinate the activities of assigned areas involving communicable disease control, public health clinics, and environmental health programs including but not limited to TB, STD, immunizations, and vaccine preventable diseases, HIV, rabies and lead. The incumbent may also provide direct patient care and provide supervision over a large number of professional, technical and clerical employees, as well as oversee internal quality assurance.

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*About Westchester County...*

*Westchester County, located in the heart of the historic Hudson Valley, covers 500 square miles and has a population of over a million. Originally home to Native Americans, who were members of the Lenape tribe, it is today a rich mix of many cultures and landscapes. The County is a blend of bustling cities, quaint villages and picturesque towns as well as open spaces and a network of beautiful parks. The County is also an intellectual capital, boasting a highly educated workforce, competitive colleges and universities, Fortune 500 companies, world changing non-profits, and cutting-edge research centers.*

**PRESIDENT'S INCOMING REMARKS****BRUCE MOLINELLI, MD PRESIDENT***(Continued from page 1)*

So **what keeps us going?** Why do physicians take on the burden of our patient's disease as personal despite the onslaught of mounting obstacles? Are we built that way, taught it? Is it instilled during training? Are we born selfless or empathic? Probably all of the above and also because that is the quintessential definition of being a physician. Helping others in a time of medical need despite the surroundings. It's a profession, a calling, a lifestyle.

**How do we maintain** this even in these changing times whose issues seem more intense than ever.... or are they more intense?

Dr. Thomas Lansen, a Westchester County neurosurgeon and past President of the WCMS, in his article from 2016, printed by the Westchester County Business Journal, entitled, *How It all Began: A Fascinating Glimpse Into The Past*, gives the history of the WCMS. The society was formed in 1797 to align physicians in a forum of discussion, collaboration and education with an intent to develop policy for good practice standards, for the medical professionals by the medical professionals. He says, *"The medical profession, buffeted by an occasionally resentful culture, distrustful of cliques and privilege, by an unreasonable system of liability tort law, by declining economic fortune and loss of control, [still] remains one of the most coveted professions in America."*

Dr Redway, a WCMS member, said, *"... with endless agencies of government: from supervisors, county officials, officials of state agencies, federal bureaus, alphabetical agencies too numerous to catalogue here, .... the profession of medicine will have to negotiate fee schedules ad infinitum..."* What makes this remarkable is the year he wrote this .....1947! And he was actually referring to previous negotiations of fee schedules that took place in 1871!

Perhaps this emphasizes that **the obstacles we face are no more burdensome or onerous than ever.** Same old problems with the same old need to continue to fight. Recognizing this should alleviate some of the angst that advocacy is ineffective. It is in fact quite effective!

**So how exactly do we combat these interfering forces and maintain the stamina?**

With physician advocacy. Enlisting physician buy-in

to advocacy is the challenge.

We need to reassure and re-engage physicians with positive and relevant changes affecting them. What has the WCMS done for me lately? Let's remind them.

It has unfortunately become easier to relinquish control when the restrictions of regulations, policies and algorithms overwhelm our resolve, fatiguing us to a learned helplessness and complacency leading to a defeated acceptance ... and ultimately ( new catch phrase), *"Burnout"*. Financial concerns further weaken our resolve. In addition, if we have no collective voice, we have no bargaining power.

Life balance is the new motto of the next generation.....and one way of recharging. Does the next generation have it right? Do we who preceded them know how to achieve balance, believe in it? Do we know how to change? Are we willing? Should we? Do we give up the fight in so doing? The volunteer physician of these societies is paramount to maintain the mission. Yet we need to incorporate how we achieve cohesion for leverage within life balance so that more physicians will take on the mantle of advocacy. Perhaps the meetings and marches and dinners are not the way of physician camaraderie of the future. These may be anachronistic. Perhaps it is through social media and other platforms.

The Rock Group Radiohead refers to the suffocation by corporate America in their 1996 release *Palo Alto*, from the re-mastered version of the OK Computer album, arguably one of their best. The lyrics are also fitting to the medical profession's stresses and metrics of productivity and profit threatening life balance.

"In the city of the future

It is difficult to concentrate

Meet the boss, meet the wife

Everybody's happy, everybody's made for life

In the city of the future

It is difficult to find a space

I'm too busy to see you

You're too busy to wait..."

**So our focus needs to be on how to replenish our professional souls and maintain a level of intensity, without burnout, and recruit more physicians to the cause.**

*(Continued on page 12)*



## PRESIDENT'S INCOMING REMARKS BRUCE MOLINELLI, MD PRESIDENT

(Continued from page 11)

One way is to harness the new and young idealism. We engage medical students, residents and young physicians. With Dr Jacobson's push, we have young physicians joining the Society, and becoming active, with positions on the Board and Executive Committee. (Drs. Kham Ali and Anais Carniciu to name a few) Infusion of new messaging modalities may well be the answer. We have a society Tik Tok, Twitter and Facebook page now.

We must also step back ourselves, and regain the perspective that what we do is special, incredible, evolving, and necessary. If only we could once again see what we do through those incredulous eyes of our fledgling careers.

It would still be seen as miraculous, not mundane....awesome ....not routine.....rewarding, not bland.

**Is this A pep talk. Yes! Absolutely! You betcha!**

We go into medicine to help others,

We also need to help ourselves

Many do not know how to do this.

So the cliché, "help yourself so you can help others" needs one additional amendment to make it pertinent. ***Help us to help ourselves to help others...***

### Who helps us?

Once again, Physician advocacy groups such as AMA, MSSNY, WCMS and other specialty societies—a political approach? absolutely— this is the necessary format to make change. Politics is not our expertise nor our passion, but is the only platform available to us.

Physicians still need assistance with specifics of a practice, both as employed physician (of which there are now more than 50%) as well as the diminishing independents. From physicians who maintain clinical practice to those with administrative, teaching or research roles, MD/DO come in many forms. Physician advocacy helps all of them.

The mission statement of the WCMS states has 6 bullet points:

"Since 1797, the WCMS has dedicated itself to "improvements in the healing arts as well as the general good of mankind." Specifically, the Society is committed to:

- 1 The advancement of medical science in Westchester County.
- 2 The improvement of the quality of medical service among the practitioners and hospitals of the County.
- 3 The protection and improvement of the public health.

4 The establishment and enforcement of the highest standards of medical competency and character among the physicians of the County.

5 The proper and ethical education of the public in matters of medicine and public health.

6 The promotion and protection of the rightful and desirable interests of the medical profession, individually and collectively, in Westchester County in accordance with the laws of the State of New York.

**How do we bring back the tired**, exhausted physician to regain what feels to be a lost autonomy ... putting our heads down and saying we will just focus on patients, with blinders to who else is insinuating themselves into that space between doctor and patient is no longer a viable strategy. – The government, insurance companies, big business, legal, profiteers, mercenaries, opportunists, - are all vying for control of healthcare. We physicians should be the driving entity.

**Physician advocacy**, financial and educational support, reduction of unnecessary or extraneous work laws, release from the burden of less pertinent tasks, relinquishment of time consuming EMR systems, reimbursement, etc ... these are the issues and there remains a nidus of physicians who are and will continue to make the fight for us.

I am not asking for you to necessarily be one of them— **asking for you to understand that what these volunteer physicians do is relevant to your practice and your life and support their good hard work.** The work of the WCMs and other societies remain important and are effective.

The risk of our profession becoming a job is upon us. Our calling is morphing into mechanical motion. Just like the factory, we punch in, perform our shift's work and punch out...in so doing, we abrogate responsibility... abrogation of responsibility begets loss of control... loss of control begets ultimate dissatisfaction.... dissatisfaction begets loss of empathic patient care

I started in a profession. I do not want to leave it as a job.

So sound the alarm, know there is a core working for the continued ideals of the profession of medicine. **All I ask is that you tell your colleagues that there is still hope and a stable core .... support them, and realize that there is a vital resource within our midst—which can help in specific pertinent ways to your practice of medicine and your ultimate happiness.**

**Tell others what we do here at the WCMS.**

***It is not over....***



## 2022 Annual Meeting

### Westchester County Medical Society Westchester Academy of Medicine

June 29, 2022



**O**n Wednesday, June 29<sup>th</sup>, the Westchester County Medical Society and the Westchester Academy of Medicine held their Annual Meeting at the Westchester Country Club in Rye, New York. About 130 members and guests enjoyed an evening of fellowship with colleagues and family, great food, networking, and the opportunity to interact with WCMS preferred business partners and sponsors. Outgoing WCMS President Jeffrey Jacobson, MD, was thanked for his outstanding leadership and gave remarks on his time as President of the medical society.

He also thanked his colleagues for all of their support throughout his year as President. Dr. Jacobson remarked on the need to continue to drive membership and to get new and existing members involved in a bigger way in order to have a stronger collective voice. Newly installed President Bruce Molinelli, MD, a general surgeon practicing in Mount Kisco, gave his inaugural remarks which can be found on page one of this publication. Please join us in welcoming Dr. Molinelli as our next President who began July 1, 2022. We wish him all the success of our previous Presidents.

We were also joined by several special guests from around the state. Dr. Parag Mehta, President of MSSNY was on hand to deliver remarks about his goals and vision for the upcoming year and spoke to some of the challenges physicians around the state face in the coming year. We were also joined by Try Oechsner, our new MSSNY EVP. Mr. Oechsner spoke about the accomplishments of MSSNY over the past year and touched on the direction that MSSNY will take moving forward. We look forward to working with both Dr. Mehta and Mr. Oechsner this year.

A special presentation was made to honor Dr. Sherlita Amler as our annual “Friend of Medicine” awardee. Dr. Amler, our Westchester Commissioner of Health spoke about the challenges she and the department have faced over the last several years, and thanked all of her colleagues for their tireless efforts during the pandemic. We would like to congratulate Dr. Amler on her award this year. She is most deserving and we appreciate all she has done to keep our Westchester community informed, safe and healthy.

Another special presentation was made to Dr. John Lombardo, Chief Medical Officer of MLMIC as our annual “Friend of the Society” awardee. This award is given each year to an individual or group who has helped the Society carry out its mission. Dr. Lombardo and MLMIC have been continuous, strong supporters of the medical society and have provided great resources and education to our members over our long relationship. We thank Dr. Lombardo and MLMIC for all they have done, and will continue to do for our society. It is an honor and a privilege to work with them.

We would like to thank all of the event sponsors and attendees for making it such a great evening. Without all of you, the work we do would not be possible.

If you would like to know more about how to get involved at the medical society, please call or email Janine Miller, Executive Director: [jmiller@wcms.org](mailto:jmiller@wcms.org), 914-967-9100





## MSSNY Podcasts

MSSNY

The Medical Society of the State of New York has created a number of podcasts on topics that are timely and relevant. In addition to weekly MSSNY Updates from the Division of Governmental Affairs, there are myriad timely and relevant podcasts on COVID-19 (both for physicians and patients) as well as a number of others on veterans, adult immunizations and emergency preparedness.

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### MSSNY Announces two NEW Podcasts on COVID-19

#### **★ A Discussion on COVID Vaccine for Patients ★**


MSSNY President, Dr. Bonnie Litvack, President-elect, Dr. Joseph Sellers and Dr. William Valenti, Chair of MSSNY’s Committee on Infectious Diseases discuss vaccines currently available for COVID-19 and answer many questions patients may have about the vaccines.

#### **★ How to Talk to Patients About Vaccine Hesitancy ★**

Dr. William Valenti, Chair of MSSNY’s Committee on Infectious Diseases discusses the history of vaccine hesitancy and offers sage advice to listeners on talking to vaccine hesitant patients.

**★★The additions of these podcasts marks 100 podcasts published on the MSSNY Podcast website!★★**





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