

A Brief Satirical Story

By William True

DATELINE: Los Angeles Valley College, Valley Star, April 18, 1991.
Exclusive interview with Stanislaus P. VanDergeldt, III, M.D., president of the American Medical Association.

STAR: I understand today is the 100th anniversary of the founding of the American Medical Association?

DR. VAN: Yes, it is indeed a proud occasion as we modestly recall and recount the tremendous contributions our association has made to the health, to the liberties, and to the American Way of Life for our countless millions of citizens both living and passed on.

STAR: What would you say is your proudest contribution?

DR. VAN: There can be but one answer to that! FEE-FOR-SERVICE MEDICINE! Representing the very essence of free enterprise, fee-for-service medicine has set the tone for all of America, and we physicians, whatever our specialty, whatever our sub-specialty, whatever our sub-sub specialty, point with pride, pleasure and pristine pusalinity, to that greatest of all human concepts, FEE-FOR-SERVICE MEDICINE.

STAR: One hears about health maintenance organizations (HMOs) providing medical care through salaried physicians. Do you have thoughts on that?

DR. VAN: Such doctors are traitors to their profession, traitors to free enterprise, traitors to the AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE, traitors, traitors, traitors, TRAITORS, TRAITORS, TRAITORS . . .

STAR: Pardon my interruption, Dr. VanDergeldt, but a recent Rand Corporation research study reported that salaried physicians in HMOs were rendering a quality of care at least as high, and sometimes higher, than doctors in fee-for-service settings.

DR. VAN: My association has long suspected the Rand Corporation of pinko leanings, and these research results certainly bear that out. Fee-for-service medicine alone allows maximum freedom to both patient and practitioner. The patient is free to choose a doctor; and the physician in turn is free to decide how many tests and treatments and surgeries he will perform on the patient, and what fair and reasonable and equitable fees he will charge for each professional service rendered. Could any arrangement possibly be more straightforward, more businesslike, or more in accord with the American Way? We must never forget what our great President Calvin Coolidge said (may he rest in peace): "The business of America is BUSINESS!"

STAR: A report out of the U.C.L.A. School of Public Health supports the Rand Corp. data, and indicates that health care costs are less in HMOs because their salaried physicians are not tempted to provide unneeded tests, treatments, and surgeries simply to increase fees.

DR. VAN: It is slanderous, outrageous, and downright UNAMERICAN, to suggest that any member of our association would provide any care beyond that absolutely necessary for the patient's health. Now, of course, we do have these horrendous malpractice insurance costs that necessitate certain tests, treatments, and surgeries, as a matter of defensive medicine. No one regrets more than we practicing

physicians that we are forced to these measures by shyster lawyers and left-wing juries who encourage malingering patients to file lawsuits. O sure, an accidental amputation, a scalpel or sponge left in a patient, an unintended dismemberment, a regrettable death of a young and healthy patient, these will occur now and then. But your dedicated professional will feel genuine remorse for each of these unfortunate outcomes.

STAR: It has been suggested that the large excess of Caesarean sections, hysterectomies, prostatectomies, disc surgeries, heart bypass operations, and other procedures that are performed under fee-for-service insurance plans, as compared to HMO plans, results from the added income it provides for doctors.

DR. VAN: That suggestion is preposterous on the face of it, and in another era, the man making it would have found himself challenged to a duel on the field of honor by any physician within earshot. Let me tell you, each member of the American Medical Association painstakingly and skillfully diagnoses each of his beloved patients, and performs only those tests, those treatments, those surgeries, those retests, those repeated treatments, and those multiple surgeries, that are required to restore the patient's health.

STAR: Is it then your position that members of your association have little interest in the amount of the income, and are only motivated to achieve professional excellence?

DR. VAN: Well put. Yes. WELL PUT, INDEED! That is truly the way it is. You realize, of course, that a reasonable income and moderate standard of living relative to the long years of training and residency are appropriate and necessary. With the Medicare and Medicaid programs cutting back on their fees, however, that is becoming more difficult. The lower the Medicare fees become, the harder it is to collect the balance of our fair and equitable charges from the individual Medicare patient. My heart goes out to some of them because I know my very reasonable charges nevertheless impact the amount they have left for food, clothing, and shelter. If organizations like the Rand Corporation and U.C.L.A. would go after the Medicare Program to increase the ludicrously low physician fees, and they would all stop harassing we doctors, the country would be a lot better off.

STAR: Official governmental reports show that the rapid inflation in health care costs has caused 40 million American to be without any kind of insurance, with an additional 70 million underinsured. Do members of your association provide free care to these people?

DR. VAN: We are absolutely committed to the concept of good, sound medical care for every American. Of course with so many people unable to pay our charges (my collection agency fees have become outrageous, and taking patients into court to collect has become almost prohibitively expensive), every doctor is feeling the squeeze. My own son came out of his residency last year and has only now saved enough to buy his first Porsche. My office associate, who has been in practice for more than 20 years, feels that he may have to keep his new Rolls Royce Silver Cloud for TWO YEARS before trading up, all because of the collection squeeze on our billings. These are bitter pills for those of us who have put our lives on the line to make America a freer and healthier place to live.

STAR: A recent Labor Department report noted that 80% of the strikes last year were over health benefits because medical care has become so costly.

DR. VAN: The history of labor unions with their materialistic demands for higher wages and benefits has always been a radical departure from the ideals of our founding fathers. Union conspiracies to enrich their members and advance their greedy purposes cause only revulsion among we in the American Medical Association.

STAR: One hears increasing talk about a national health insurance program to be patterned after the Canadian system which guarantees health care for all Canadians. Do you have a position on that?

DR. VAN: We do indeed. We know the kind of forces and despicable radicals who are behind that movement to bring **SOCIALIZED MEDICINE** to America. These are the same people who have continuously been **BORING FROM WITHIN** to undermine everything that has made America great, to **DRAG OUR FREEDOMS DOWN** to the common level where individual initiative and enterprise count for nothing and where the right to choose your own doctor and **PAY HIM HIS FAIR AND EQUITABLE FEE WHICH HE HAS EARNED** is put in jeopardy, and where no woman is safe on the streets and **HOODLUMS ARE ALLOWED TO RUN AMUCK ATTACKING OUR VIRGINS AND STUFF AND WHERE FEE-FOE-SERVICE MEDICINE IS TRAMPLED IN THE GUTTER ALONG WITH OUR SACRED MOTHERS WHO HAVE SACRIFICED TO MAKE US FREE AND WHERE GOD IN HIS HEAVEN AND HIS PLANS FOR US ARE MOCKED AND MADE A MULTIFARIOUS MOCKER AND WHERE . . .**

STAR: Thank you so much, Dr. VanDergeldt . . . let me help you over to the couch here . . . please lie down for a moment . . . I'll bring some water.