

## President's Corner

*By Gary Goldbaum MD, MPH*



Summer has finally arrived, in force. The skies are clear, temperatures are up, the grills are ready! As we prepare to enjoy a Northwest summer, it's good to reflect on our profession's role in making the Northwest (especially Snohomish County) so enticing. For all the challenges that the health care system faces, we are blessed locally to have hospitals, clinics, and providers that are engaged in their communities. I especially want to call out a program in which the Snohomish County Medical Society has played a major role. Project Access Northwest (PANW) is a non-profit organization serving King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties (with Kitsap to be served soon). PANW recruits specialists to donate their services to care for uninsured patients. Primary care providers can then refer patients to PANW, which orchestrates everything, from scheduling appointments and arranging the supporting services to educating patients to be on time and compliant. Specialists see patients in their offices. Hospitals provide operating rooms. Laboratories and imaging services donate essential ancillary services. For physicians who volunteer, caring for PANW referrals is easy. Records are available, laboratory and imaging studies are current, interpreters are provided (if needed), and patients are truly prepared. The result is that patients get the care they need while physicians feel gratified doing what they do best.

The Medical Society helped PANW get started in Snohomish County, sponsoring early meetings of providers, contributing funding, and recruiting physicians. Subsequently, PANW has been a real success locally. In the first quarter of 2013, primary care providers referred 105 Snohomish County residents to PANW, resulting in 115 referrals to specialists, including 20 to gastroenterologists, 16 to orthopedists, 11 to otolaryngologists, and the remainder to 20 other specialties. If you haven't already done so, please join your colleagues and volunteer. PANW takes care of all the patient details (PANW has a low 5% no-show rate!) PANW's support makes your donation of charity care easy. Call or email Scott Shurtleff at 206-496-1592 or [scotts@projectaccessnw.org](mailto:scotts@projectaccessnw.org) for more information. You can also learn more at [www.projectaccessnw.org](http://www.projectaccessnw.org).

Although health care reform will mean fewer people without insurance, it will not mean everyone has insurance and it will not assure that those who need care will be able to access it. There will still be a role for programs such as PANW. I hope that the need for donated services will decrease, but I suspect that the need for coordination of care will increase, as systems seek to become more efficient. PANW will undoubtedly find a new niche in this brave new world. And the Medical Society will continue to support PANW's service model.

Indeed, the Snohomish County Medical Society is focusing on service, to its members and to the community. For members, the Medical Society provides newsletters and forums to update you on local issues, as well as opportunities to have your voice heard at the state level. For the community, the Medical Society supports programs such as Project Access Northwest, to improve local access to care.

And this is what makes the Northwest so appealing. We have fine summers and a medical community that cares.