

OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

What Happened to Putting the Patient First?

As I walk down the corridors of a major New Jersey medical center, I cannot help but notice rows of medical professionals transfixed to computer screens ("The Doctor's Office Becomes an Assembly Line" by Devorah Goldman, op-ed, Dec. 30). The data consumes their attention. While patients wait, the professionals robotically configure information into medical "notes."

This is a laborious process. I often thank God that I paid attention in Ms. McGillicutty's high-school typing class, not knowing how important it would be at this stage in my career.

I can understand the rationale. The consolidation of data would avoid the duplication of services, which could bring astronomical savings. But let us not forget the patient. The number of hours in the day is unchanged and the additional computer tasks extract time from the doctor-patient encounter. Many physicians are resigned to entering data using computer tablets during the patient encounter, and avoiding eye contact. It's very easy for the patient to feel distant and ignored, leading to further erosion of the doctor-patient relationship.

This is the medical equivalent of texting while driving. It may not be long before we realize the extent of its effect on patient care.

RONALD FRANK, M.D.
West Orange, N.J.

I am one of those independent private practitioners mentioned in Ms. Goldman's article who will be shutting down my practice. For 30 years, I accepted all insurances, saw patients the same day if need be, treated some for free and personally kept aware of every aspect of their care. But Medicare threatens me with 9% cuts for not compiling data for the system, the insurers hire private companies to demand refunds on payments they made to me years ago, and I received a check for a difficult cata-

Meanwhile, when I tried to get an appointment for myself at the health-care system my insurance demands I use, there was a three-month wait. I don't know for whom to feel more sorry—my patients or myself.

MARC ROSENBLATT, M.D.
New York

Many older doctors practice medicine because they enjoy it. But they don't enjoy having to see a certain number of patients an hour, they don't adapt easily to the new system, and when pushed they simply retire. We're losing all that knowledge and experience, right when we boomers are aging and need knowledgeable doctors.

Also consider what you have to go through to speak to your doctor with these new medical groups. First, you are told to call 911 if it's an emergency. Then, you get a whole speech about Covid. Next, you are told, "We are experiencing unusually high call volumes," and get put on hold. After endless repeated babble and noise that passes for music to some, you finally get the phone tree, and eventually you might even get an operator. All this to ask a question or check an appointment. It's almost not worth it.

ALAN BLUM
Mount Vernon, N.Y.

Ms. Goldman writes that "doctors must operate with a clear sense of who they are serving the patients in front of them, not the government, collection systems, insurance companies or hospital directors."

If only that were true. I would be the customer and price value. But it has been the reality for many years. The third-party payment, insurance and the patient as customer, physician continu-

constitutional. appealing the Electoral and we're happy to see others on the right have followed. Even Polit- finally noticed. Democrats run both houses press and they are in the position to put the Elec- tional Act on the agenda. press for partisan ad- arious bills to overturn se bills would require filibuster rule to pass, they'd also erode confi- process. Republican support for reasingly destabilizing ctions. Seven conserva- es wrote in a Jan. 3 state- xt of the United States "that "Congress has one toral votes that have in state, as designated by o so under state law." guage could clarify that re over and the Electoral ss can't change the out- states would be settled judiciary as the best fo- nis is what happened in sh v. Gore. The Supreme have intervened in 2020 een competing slates of uling the Electoral Count ty with a partisan advan- d time to pass such legis- ows who will control each in 2025. aying Jan. 6 must never eir main goal seems to be day against Republi- out "never