

# Decommissioned

by Robert Finch

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Sometime in mid-February, I gave Representative Mike Abrams a ride home from the airport. On the way, we discussed the state of Florida's health care system. We talked about indigent care, liability protection, AIDS and a host of other health-care-related legislative issues. And, to say the least, we did not see eye to eye.

At one point, Abrams said something about our (the FMA) needing to get on board in support of his Florida Health Care Commission proposal. He did not elaborate and I paid little attention to his statement at the time. The real threat for 1991, I was sure, would be Universal Access (HB 1). For months it appeared to be the issue most likely to become a problem and I had been talking about it at all of my county medical society legislative committee meetings.

"Besides," I thought to myself, "first-year bills, such as the proposed Health Care Commission, never go anywhere, especially if they implement major, expensive new programs."



By the start of the session on March 5th, Abrams had soft-sold his concept to the House Health Care Committee and many of his house colleagues. He told them that the proposed commission could not do anything without the legislature's approval and that its primary function would be to make recommendations about how to contain costs and improve access.

In my opinion, legislation that creates a brand-new bureaucracy and gives it administrative control over a \$34 billion-a-year industry does not fit the definition of "not doing anything." Further, any state agency that has a division of professional fee regulation is not lacking in authority to act on its own. The proposed commission was far from being the innocuous entity its proponents claimed it was and came way too close to becoming a reality.

But the 1991 version of the Florida Health Care Commission is dead, so it really does no good to go on discussing what it did or did not actually do. What is important to discuss is how this legislation was killed, because I guarantee you that we will be going through this again next year.

There is no Florida Health Care Commission today because enough of our legislators heard that it was a bad idea from enough of the physicians who live in their districts. Enough, in this case, was just barely enough. This language was not removed from consideration until the last stop before passage on the final night of the legislative session.

The volume of calls, letters, telegrams and personal visits from doctors and auxiliaries to legislators about issues important to them probably reached a new high in Florida this session. I know because several legislators have complained to me about the amount of work their staffs will have to do in order to respond to these communications. Those of you who got involved can judge your effect by review-

ing the scroll of onerous legislation laid waste by your collective voice.

Since our legislators failed to come to grips with any of our health-care crises this year, the perceived need for change will multiply in the coming months. Those of you who are activists for your profession will shape new plans and make the needed changes only if you encourage and enlist more of your peers to participate in the process. Inaction now will allow the growing few with simplistic "free care for all" mentalities to determine the course, availability and quality of health care in Florida.

Perhaps the scare we received this year will be enough to make those who remained idle realize that what organized medicine can do for them is only equal to what they are willing to do for themselves. And with that in mind, I offer my sincere thanks to those of you who took the time to act during these past months. We would have failed without you. ■

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That is the common logic in Tallahassee. Bills are supposed to evolve. Each year opposing forces add and subtract ingredients to and from ideas until they become digestible by both side but neither really likes the taste; then they pass. Since a Universal Access bill had been filed and heard in 1990, HB 1 seemed like the logical vehicle for any major health care reform this year.

Sometimes there are exceptions to logic. Public pressure for the legislature to address health care cost and access problems had reached a point that something had to happen. It is ironic that the bill that moved due to this pressure would not provide any real relief to those in need until 1996, if at all.

## In Memoriam

*J.S. Robert McFall, M.D.  
November 8, 1916  
—May 20, 1991*

Dr. J.S. Robert McFall, exemplary physician, founding member of Anesthesia Professional Association, a mariner's mariner and friend, has ended a long courageous battle with cancer.

He will always be remembered by his friends for his love of medicine and the sea.

*They that go down to the sea in ships . . .  
These see the works of the Lord  
and his wonders in the deep . . .  
So he bringeth them unto their  
desired haven.*

—Psalm 107:23