

## The Arizona Republic

### Patient care, not financial gain, must take priority

by **Richard O. Dolinar** - Mar. 24, 2009 12:00 AM

#### My Turn

One of the biggest issues Arizonans consider every day is their own and their family's healthcare.

Every Arizonan deserves access to quality healthcare and medicine, and deserves transparency from providers, but at what cost?

What many don't know is that there is a serious threat to patient care that takes place every day in Arizona. It is called therapeutic substitution or switching. Switching is the dispensing of a less-expensive alternative medication that is in the same therapeutic class as the one originally prescribed but is not chemically or generically equivalent.

It is practiced by insurance companies looking to boost their bottom line, and can put the patient's health at risk. In addition, doctors face an uphill battle with insurance companies that won't cover a preferred prescribed medication.

The companies often put pressure on doctors to prescribe a second choice drug or a generic drug that won't treat the patient the way that was intended; but one which is cheaper for them to purchase.

While generics often save money, patients have to be careful. It is my responsibility to make sure my patient's care is the first priority and that I do everything in my power, following my own code of conduct, to make sure they are being treated properly.

My patients need to trust that all of my practices are transparent, and that I am not taking cash or other inducements from insurance companies to switch them from a brand-name drug that is already working for them.

The Alliance for Patient Access has created a petition in support of a national Health Insurer Code of Conduct, and we all should sign it. The petition calls for the adoption of a Code of Conduct, currently being drafted by the American Medical Association, which will address restrictive practices of the managed-care industry that undermine the integrity of doctor-patient relationships.

The petition calls for autonomy between doctors and managed-care companies, as well as full transparency regarding a patient's prescribed course of care. The alliance also calls for upholding business integrity, with fees reflecting acceptable rates and prescribed courses of treatment resulting from medically based, not fiscally driven, decisions.

Finally, and most importantly, the alliance's first priority remains patients' access to quality medical care that ensures their safety and welfare.

With all of this going on, the best course of action is to push for and support this national-health insurer code of conduct to protect all Arizonans. I support this action and I encourage all my colleagues and patient-advocacy groups throughout Arizona to sign this petition by visiting [www.insurepatientaccess.org](http://www.insurepatientaccess.org).

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