



**Archival & Historical Committee
March 7, 2009
Washington, DC**

**Interview with Marcelino Oliva, DO, FACOFP
In Memory of Frank J. McDevitt, DO, FACOFP
AOA President – 1981-1982
ACOFP Family Physician of Year Award - 1978**

Dr. Froelich: Dr. Oliva, we are here in Washington, D.C. to interview you specifically about past ACOFP fellow, Frank McDevitt, D.O., FACOFP. I know that you had a very close and personal relationship with Dr. McDevitt through years of leadership and friendship. As we know, Dr. McDevitt had a huge influence on the shaping of the AOA as well as the ACGP/ACOFP right up to his death on January 30, 2004. During this interview we would like ask you questions about Dr. McDevitt and especially his influence on the ACGP/ACOFP. Are there any questions from the Committee?

Committee Member: Could you tell us a little bit about your friendship with Dr. McDevitt especially about how it began and how it evolved through the later years?

Dr. Oliva: I first met Frank when I was a former president of the Florida Osteopathic Medical Association (FOMA). In 1975, Dr. Wilson, President of the AOA from Florida, asked me to be a member of the Bureau of the Council in Federal Health Programs. Frank came to speak to us about the Professional Standards Review Organization (PSRO). From that point on our relationship grew. This was the first job I had at the AOA and at that point the icons of AOA leadership were Frank McDevitt; Joe Namey; John Burnett; Ray Saloom all of whom were the influential members; and several other people that served on that bureau. So little by little, I got acquainted with Frank more and more, and as the years went by, that acquaintance became more of a friendship

and then a trust that we had with each other. I can assure you that by no means did I agree with Frank all of the time on every issue. We had serious discussions and differences of opinion, but we always had a strong and honest trust until the day he died. Frank was a very loyal and honest man. If Frank McDevitt told you he was going to do something, he would do it. If somebody was going to do something that might harm you or affect the ACOFP or that would affect my position or, let's say Florida, in any way bad, he would be the first one there fighting on our behalf. Because of those things, our mutual respect grew. We all know that coalition makes political power and if you get a coalition that has the votes and that will vote as a group, then you can have greater influence and can hopefully shape things in a meaningful way. Frank had a knack for coalition building and he helped shape the way that the AOA and AOA leadership was going. So, that's the beginning and it lasted all that time. I have visited with him at his home, and he visited me at mine. My wife Lora Lee helped out Barbara McDevitt when she was sick and they were living in Stuart, Florida. We always had a good relationship, and like any relationship, there are rocky moments. The great thing with our relationship was that once we discussed and clarified our issues and disagreements with each other, they would never come back again. I can expand some more; Frank was a true osteopathic physician. That is, being in primary care was a really big thing to him. He watched out for the ACGP[ACOFP] and the AOBFP. As he went through his practice life, people saw the same thing in him that I saw eventually, his leadership abilities. A lot of people feared him because he was always at the head of leadership. They all wanted to be in his favor. Then he really flourished in Michigan. He became a major leader in Michigan and remained as such until the day he died. He was the medical director for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan for years until he was forced to retire and even then the bosses there put him in a position as head of the foundation.

While he was with Blue Cross and Blue Shield for all those years, he opened many doors for Michigan osteopathic physicians in regard to reimbursement from “the Blues”. As you may or may not know, the Blues were completely separate in every state. Frank’s relationship and influence on Blue Cross was a big deal for osteopathic medicine because we didn't enjoy that kind of leadership in many states. As an example, the Florida Blues shut us out for years and for no good reason. Frank McDevitt really got things rolling with Blue Cross and not just in Michigan. Things are different now as things tend to be. Another thing that Frank did for the profession was that he molded a lot of the leadership, especially in Michigan. He taught leaders how to lead. He taught them to be a lot like him, and a lot about what, in my perception, were the best attributes that he had to offer the profession. So that was our beginning and our end. He attended my daughter's wedding and stayed with us and helped me. I showed him how to cook a whole hog, Cuban style. I still have those pictures. Another thing, and I don't want to put an envy over here, but I think I smoked more cigars and drank more Scotch when Frank was alive than I really should have, but it seemed that you couldn't get his attention unless you had spent all of those nights smoking cigars.

Committee Member: Tell us something about the formation of the small state federation. Frank was always in on the election of the new people on the AOA Board and the AOA presidents. I was surprised to hear you say that you and Dr. McDevitt were the ones that were able to get an AOA bylaws change that increased the number of people on the AOA Board and that you two were instrumental in getting leadership to agree that the new positions should be for small states. That was a major issue at the time wasn't it?

Dr. Oliva: Well, Frank brought Michigan to that action; actually it was Michigan and Pennsylvania with Joe Namey and Texas with John Burnett that got everything agreed to. At that time Texas was still part of that [large states] caucus. So with those states

onboard and we passed the resolution and changed the bylaws. We added three spots to the AOA Board. We agreed that those three spots would go to states that were not represented and that was the understanding that we had. You could not “slot” those spots in the bylaws, but by gentleman’s agreement those slots went to people that were from the small states and then little-by-little things evolved to the way they are today. I think that it was very helpful to the organization to give the small states more representation. It helped us as an organization as the small states became larger. We set up a system of regional executive directors or regional directors. Those things, little-by-little, got the membership to grow in the small states.

Dr. Froelich: Dr. Oliva, I think it's undisputed that Frank McDevitt was the one person that probably held more power and influence than any single individual in the AOA’s history. Can you give us insight on how one person could keep a grip on that sort of influence and how was he able to hold the large states coalition together?

Dr. Oliva: We had problems in the coalition during his tenure no doubt, but he chaired the caucus for some time. There were times when we'd pass it around some, but Frank usually chaired it, until he died. The power he had was the coalition, in other words we controlled 60% of the votes through our large states coalition. The other thing was not to have a dictatorship but to be benevolent. It was always Frank who would go out to find out who was going to be next in line for president by talking to other leaders because coalitions were important and so was fair representation. Howard Neer and I shared the Florida delegation chairmanship, but Frank had that coalition and the group that controlled it. The only question was who was going to go up next and who was going to fall off. We had little fights about that as well. I remember very clearly, Frank never thought it was my time to move up. I’ll never forget, we were in Texas, in Dallas, and Joe Namey and Frank McDevitt and John Burnett and myself and our wives, we went out to dinner and as always it gets back into politics. I asked about

when I was going to go up to AOA President; you know, when is it going to be my time? So Frank said, "Well, I don't think it's time for you to move up now," or something to that affect. I said, "Frank, all you guys tell me what a charismatic guy I am. I mean I can get along." I said, "I have an approval rating in the past that surpasses 80% and all that," and I said, "Everybody seems to think that I'd fit well since I've done the jobs that I've done," and I said, "But I have noticed in the past years, and particularly since my involvement with this group here that my popularity is on the decline. I don't want it to get down to about 55% before you decide it is time." I'll never forget John Burnett, with that big Texas drawl, he says, "Frank, I think Marce's got the votes." So, finally, I was put in that line and I got to run for President-elect of the AOA.

Committee Member: Can you tell us, about that very tenuous time when the AOA didn't have an executive director and Frank assumed the position of running the AOA? With all of the other things that he was involved in, can you tell us what he did to make sure that the AOA stayed cohesive when we were without an executive director?

Dr. Oliva: Well, that's right. He served as executive director for a period of time and basically he was asked to do so and he found... I mean he was asked to do it because at that time he was the one that had more administrative experience than anything else. He went to Chicago then traveled back and forth. He was compensated with expenses and all of that stuff, but he did it and managed those departments and AOA business went on as usual.

Committee Member: What were the events that led up to that, if you can maybe just tell us?

Dr. Oliva: Well, I think that occurred when John Perin, if my memory's correct, took a position to be the President of Kansas City College, of the school in Kansas City. I think that was the time that there was a lapse there. Then after that, we hired Draba*. But I

think, if my memory's correct, I think it occurred the lapse when Perin was left for Kansas City.

Dr. Froelich: We are out of time and we're going to have to leave the room, so are there any final questions?

Committee Member: Thank you, that was helpful.

Dr. Froelich: Is there anything that you would like to tell us about Dr. McDevitt that we didn't ask about?

Dr. Oliva: No, some of the other things that I thought of I wouldn't be able to tell you because they would be edited out! Frank might come back and get me for saying some of those things. I wouldn't be surprised if I walked out the door right now and he was standing there saying, "Come here I want to talk to you..."