



EDITOR'S MESSAGE

The Physician's Voice

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The hot winds of spring and summer are upon us, storms and weather warnings abound. Tempers flare and misunderstandings are escalated. Across the United States, our patients and communities have been impacted by domestic violence, gun violence and weather disasters, while being terrorized by viruses.

Primary care physicians (PCPs) are leaders in the community—rural and urban—and the first person who recognizes, advises and understands the patient, family and community in which they serve. They have been described as the one respected voice in the community and are often asked the “real” patient questions as they exit the room—the doorknob conversation during which patients pose statements like “Doctor, my daughter is not doing well in school,” or “Doctor, I’m worried about my husband’s drinking.” Your voice is sought to decide if this is normal or needs attention. You are often asked not only to evaluate but also to decide what course of treatment is needed, and often, these issues involve emotional or mental health issues. In fact, PCP intervention over a 10-year period (1987–1997) shows an increase from 37.3% to 74.5% in medications prescribed for depression.

You see signs of stress, job and school issues, mental illness, and domestic violence on top of the other serious diseases patients are fighting daily. Your skill in the room keeps your patients on the path of healthier behaviors while fighting for their lives. Your advice resonates with patients and the physicians’ words are some of the most respected words in the community, and when disaster strikes, you are the first to volunteer and to be available to help your community. We have seen in rural and urban areas the disaster that has happened with gun violence and weather-related incidents; the physician’s hope is to be able to understand and intervene both before and as disaster happens. Once disaster strikes, it is not over in a day or a week; it can last a lifetime for our patients, families and communities.

As you navigate the weather of summer, your cool-headed advice and voice can help many cope with uncertainty and create solutions that fit, whether deescalating a misunderstanding, directing a patient to a needed service or just listening to emotional cries.