



me that SAMA membership is not worth it, and I'm afraid they may be right. The medical aid industry should be made aware that they exist solely because of us, and not the other way around (arrogant but true), and SAMA should be at the forefront of this battle, because a battle it is.

P W L Groenveld

1 Castanea Place
Florida Glen
1709

1. Caldwell RI. My number is up (Forum). *S Afr Med J* 2003; 93: 909.
2. Lee NC. To the barricades comrades! (sorry — colleagues) (Briewe). *S Afr Med J* 2004; 94: 8.

Practice number furore

To the Editor: Medical practitioners are obliged by the Medical Schemes Act (Government Gazette No. 20556/20, October 1999) to incorporate into their accounts a practice code number 'issued by the registering authorities'. Such numbers have been in use for some years. The Act does not anticipate that there should be a cost to providing the number, and it is highly improbable that the Act anticipated that it would be used to create a profit-making monopoly. Nevertheless, over the last few years the Board of Health Care Funders (BHF) have attempted to levy a fee for the use of these practice numbers.

The practice number has an administrative benefit to the medical aids, but no obvious benefit to the medical practitioner. There is therefore no reason why the medical practitioner should pay a fee for this service.

The overall cost to the medical profession, at R100 per practitioner (the current fee) is over R3 million per annum, likely to increase in the future if the BHF succeeds in this ruse.

The BHF have exerted pressure on medical practitioners to pay this fee. If the BHF feel they have a legitimate claim against medical practitioners, they have available to them the conventional relief of civil litigation, i.e. to approach the dispute through the Magistrates Court.

Instead, the BHF have elected to intimidate medical practitioners by:

1. Spreading the rumour that any medical practitioner who has not paid the BHF has an 'inactive practice'. This is malicious defamation for which the BHF should be called to account.
2. Instructing individual medical aids to not make payment to either the practitioner or their member. By attempting to interfere with the flow of income to the medical practitioner to ensure their demands are met, the BHF are engaging in the criminal act of extortion.

The medical aids seem to have become unwilling intermediaries in this power struggle and only a few have

attempted to enforce the directive from the BHF to withhold fees. At least a few have buckled and 're-instated the practice numbers'. Well they might, since to withhold these fees for their own use is an illegitimate diversion of funds. One might well ask to whom the benefit of accrued interest falls.

There are strong reasons why medical practitioners should resist these threats by the BHF, not the least of which is to distance the profession from this distasteful and illegal ploy. Since the medical aids are now more reluctant to become involved as intermediaries (and might well consider their own legal position) it is unlikely that the BHF will withstand their bluff being called.

It is to be hoped that all medical practitioners will refuse to pay any fee for the use of a practice number in the future.

I have forwarded this document to the Board of Health Care Funders for comment, but no response has been received.

J P Driver-Jowitt

3 Norfolk Road
Newlands
Cape Town

Kruisiging artikel — bravo!

Aan die Redakteur: Soos die publikasie van die uitstekende histories-geneeskundige artikel oor die kruisiging¹ vir professor C F van der Merwe² dronkgeslaan het, so slaan sy beswaar my totaal dronk, aangesien dit 'n uiters deeglik nagevorsde, tydigte en hoogs interessante artikel oor 'n hoogs paslike onderwerp is.

Die artikel is duidelik onder die afdeling 'History of Medicine' geplaas en ook ongetwyfeld met dieselfde doel nagevors en gepubliseer. Dit is vanselfsprekend nie bedoel vir die gruheid daaraan verbonde nie, maar vir die histories-medies wetenskaplike inkleding van 'n onomstootlike historiese feit wat vir baie mense en selfs sommige geneeshere met 'n kulturele aanvoeling lig werp op 'n hoogs emotiewe en persoonlike geloofservaring. Hiervoor loof ek die skrywers — ook vir die tydigheid, die deeglikheid en die aanvoeling waarmee die feite aangebied word.

As wedergebore Christen het dit my aan die hart geraak om van die haas onmenslike lyding te lees wat my Verlosser ook vir my sondes en verlossing moes deurstaan. Die grafiese beskrywing van die intense lyding verbonde aan hierdie allerverskriklikste teregstelling kan 'n Christen se geloof net versterk, sy dankbaarheid teenoor sy Verlosser verdiep, en hom insig gee in die werklik onbeskryflike en onverklaarbare liefde wat Jesus Christus vir sondears het.

In 'n era waartydens die akademiese post-modernisme die geloofsgronde van die Christendom bevraagteken en die