AMA President Thanks All of Radiology - 1995

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Robert E. McAfee, president of the American Medical Association and keynote speaker at the RCI Convocation last month, said in his opening remarks: "Congratulations for radiology's great contributions to the magnificence of American medicine."

Dr. McAfee, a practicing general and vascular surgeon for the past 35 years, said he has come to know radiologists "as friends" and to rely on them as "trusted colleagues." He said that, practically, it would be impossible for him to do his job without radiology and radiologists. As a physician, a surgeon, a colleague and a friend, Dr. McAfee said, "thank you" to all radiologists. The AMA president marveled at the advances that radiology has made: CT, MRI, in nuclear medicine, with skin needle biopsy and in angiography. He called it a "marvelous personal and professional experience to watch the evolution of far safer, far more accurate, far less uncomfortable, and far more beneficial tests for outpatients. They have been some of the greatest advances in all of medicine."

Even 100 years ago, said Dr. McAfee, Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen knew that the discovery of his miraculous rays would transform medicine. But did he know just how profound that transformation would be? In the beginning, Roentgen's rays were "little more than magic lanterns used for parlor tricks" such as guessing the contents of women's purses, Dr. McAfee said. Also, in Brooklyn, a Boys Club was formed to experiment with these new rays, for instance, a foot in a high-top shoe where the hob nails and lace hooks are more visible than the metatarsals.

Dr. McAfee pointed out several examples of how x-rays have benefited patients: increased the survival rate of soldiers wounded in war, provided a definitive diagnosis of battered child syndrome and have put the abuser behind bars for a longtime, saved a woman's breast because of early detection and sophisticated treatment of breast cancer and expanded the clogged arteries of a person's heart with angioplasty. "You ain't seen nothing yet," Dr. McAfee remarked, referring to how radiologic technology can also track a catheter, fine and delicate, as it winds its way into the tiniest arteries of the brain. Three-D imaging allows surgeons to plan out and perfect their technique over again on the computer screen. And teleradiology is one of medicine's first and surely not last forays on the information highway. "Radiology has progressed from diagnosis to therapy to intervention," Dr. McAfee said. "You have transversed the frontiers of medicine from imaging to imagination. From outlining broken bones to illuminating the mystery that makes us human - the miracle of thought, itself."

He pointed out that radiology has done this not only for the House of Medicine but as part of the House of Medicine. He noted that six specialty groups are now represented in the AMA House of Delegates and 60 percent of all radiologists belong to the AMA. He said that radiologists have been working with the AMA to develop practice parameters and alternative methods of dispute resolutions for liability claims. "You were first in line to join the effort and you stayed with us," Dr. McAfee said.
He emphasized the need for radiology to stand together with the House of Medicine on a common foundation. A foundation on which the AMA was formed more than 140 years ago - built on strong respect for medical ethics; quality medical education at the undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate levels; and a commitment to keeping the doctor-patient relationship from being violated by public or private intervention. "Radiology has been a willing, active and involved participant in the process," he said. "I expect that you will always be a fundamental source of inspiration and strength for organized medicine." Since the days of Roentgen's discovery, radiology has not stopped "pushing the boundaries of medicine," he added. "Radiology has never been content to accept the status quo." He said: "Radiology has achieved a level of technical excellence unparalleled in medicine." Radiology has immeasurably improved the quality of life for millions of patients.

In closing, he asked radiology to: "Continue to stagger us with your inventiveness, your dedication and your power to cure."