

The Review

Monday morning as Wes drove to work, he reflected on the activities of the past two weeks, since he had assumed the post of interim administrator of Peter Brannan Hospital. Hap's funeral had taken place a week earlier. The local scout troop, of which he had served as scoutmaster for the past twelve years, served as his pallbearers. The large attendance at his funeral reflected Hap's visibility in the community and the high esteem with which many physicians and employees held him.

Saturday evening, Rachel Brannan hosted the yearly board/medical staff party. Wes used the opportunity to learn more about the community's perceptions of Peter Brannan Hospital. It was apparent that many were concerned about the vacuum created by Hap's death. The medical staff, specifically, feared that Wycoff would use this vacuum to push his cost-cutting agenda even further.

Dr. Emil Flagg bent Wes's ear on the dangers of corporate medicine. For thirty minutes, he extolled the virtues of the administrator of a neighboring hospital, who was unwilling to subject the medical staff to the "dual degradation of budgeting and managed care." Flagg was especially critical of HMOs that controlled patient flows.

"Some of our doctors have spent twenty years building their medical practices," he said, "and they aren't worth a nickel now. HMOs own their patients."

"The older docs feel betrayed," he continued, "disconnected from the healthcare system they helped build. The administrators who run the HMOs are nothing more than bookies. They hire statisticians to study the probabilities of morbidity and mortality, then figure out ways to keep all the profits by shifting the risk to the doctors and the hospitals."

Dr. Amos took a more moderate view. "I agree with what Krimmel says about the need for a market mechanism. The old system wasn't good at involving all the stakeholders, but managed care isn't solving the problem either. We're substituting efficiency for thoroughness and quality. That's a scary trade-off when you're dealing with human lives."

“Since insurance companies are paying the bill, they’re starting to dictate practice protocols, an activity that should be performed exclusively by the physician. Managed care is becoming another bureaucracy, except that this time it is being run by the private sector rather than the government.”

The evening brought other revelations. Dr. Matthew Brannan brought Amy Castleton to the party with him. Wes noticed how Matt looked at her when no one was watching. That evening, Wes developed a strong dislike for Brannan. He didn’t know why—or at least wasn’t willing to admit the reason to himself.