

November 3, 2011

Colleagues:

I have just spent two days and four meetings with many of you trying to help you understand our new insurance options. Your questions were sometimes simplistic yet often profound. Many of you lamented that you longed for a past time when "things" were simpler. It seemed to you that not only do you pay too much for health care, but you now are expected to be one of the providers! Starting with decisions on plans needing detailed actuarial extrapolations, moving on to scheduling, prescription coordinating, accounting, claims adjusting, medical reporting, IRS expertise, and even on-line diagnostics. When did health care change from a professional/expert service to at best a "team approach" or at worst a self-service industry? I do not have an answer for you.

As your WBLTA President and Head Negotiator I have a unique perspective on this. As many of you know, my formal education was first in Economics. I know, Economics is called "the dismal science" for a reason. We constantly bring up problems that are concrete, and solutions, if any, that seem like jello. We seldom have good answers, but are very good at identifying problems. Such is the case today. Economics has a concept called "Shadow Work". (I've attached a copy of a great article about this concept) In simple terms, it is the concept of new tasks or duties added to a job without a commensurate increase in pay. Often these tasks appear as a result of new technologies, productive efficiencies, or "re-aligned" positions. Let me be clear, this IS NOT exclusively an educational issue. It is much more broad based.

However, we in education have been hit particularly hard by this phenomenon. Those of you with 15+ years of teaching under your belt can attest to this best. I was actually the "technology chair" for North Campus in the mid 1990's. Our big push was for phones in every classroom! We never considered that the phone lines worked two ways, outgoing and incoming. We soon had more phones calls and messages than we ever dreamed of. Another 30-45 minutes added to our day answering or returning calls in the name of progress or technology. Of course the increased parent communication was a positive. However, it did expand our jobs and our time on duty, without expanding our salary. Take a few minutes and consider the "advances" in the last 10-15 years that we in education have endured. The vast majority of them were well received and could arguably be considered improvements, but the bottom line is they all added to our duty day somehow. Off the top of my head; phones, bubble-sheet attendance, computers, scantron attendance, grade programs, e-mails, skyward, google apps, shoology, etc., etc., etc.! Of course, this does not include the added curriculum over the years that the state and national legislatures have added. The bottom line is simple, our jobs have indeed gotten harder. At the same time, inflation has increased, and our salaries have NOT kept pace.

If you want to help remedy this issue, YOU MUST GET INVOLVED! Keep updated on issues, attend union meetings, support your colleagues, vote, complain to authority, MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

Together we are far more powerful.

Michael McKenzie, Ed.D.
President, WBLTA