



Dr. Grayson, a St. Charles, Ill., internist, has attracted considerable publicity since his 1969 decision to enclose with each monthly bill a pink note telling patients that if they judge his bills to be out of line they can reduce them as they wish.

Bargaintown—patients offered discount

By Richard R. Grayson, MD

"Your money or your life!" said the armed robber to Jack Benny in one of his most famous comedy skits. Benny replied, "I'm thinking it over."

I have received several hundred congratulatory letters from people all over the United States and even a few from abroad asking that I continue to encourage my fellow physicians to adopt more humane methods of charging and billing their patients.

These letters were sent in response to publicity about my "pink slip, do-it-yourself discount system" which was generated by a story in the *AMA Update* newsletter of May, 1974. This mail conveys the feeling that some people think of doctors as armed robbers who say, "Your money or your life."

ONE ROUGH, faithful patient of mine, of whom I suspect certain outlaw tendencies, if not connections, expressed the view that all merchants were "ripping off" the people anyway

so they deserved to be robbed.

I asked if he thought all profit is bad. He said most is bad because the merchant gives you no chance to negotiate, even if you are starving. I said, well, every time you pay me, I make a profit on you; is that bad? He answered, "No, because the first time I came in here you gave me that pink slip which says that if I can't pay your full bill, I can still be treated. That means to me you are not holding me up; I'm not getting ripped off again."

Another patient, a good friend, says that he is going to pay my full fee each time he receives my bill for his family's office visits because he wants to be sure I'm still available if he is ever broke. Not a bad idea, considering that his wife has just become unemployed and he might be next.

An old lady who had accumulated a large bill with me due to hospitalization and prolonged illness is on Social Security and Medicare, but she hurried to pay her bill in full after figuring in her self-discount of 25%. She said she

wanted to make sure she paid it before I changed my system of allowing people to pay what they could.

I AM NOT GOING to change my mind about letting patients take their own discounts. Why should I? There is no stress in my practice over money. No patients are angry over money. Nobody ever fights with me, and my collections are better than ever!

Hans Selye calls this system of ethics "altruistic egotism." He states, "By making another person wish that we should prosper because of what we have done—and hence are likely to do for him again—we elicit good-will. This perhaps is the most humane way of assuring our own well-being."

Perhaps that is what King Solomon meant in Ecclesiastes 11:1: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."

THE PARAPHRASED Living Bible translates the same admonition this way: "Give generously, for your gifts will return to you later. Divide your gifts among many, for in the days ahead you yourself may need much help."

Can anyone doubt that in the days ahead—with the malpractice crisis and the socialized medicine crisis—we ourselves are going to need much help? □