

Medical Economics[®]

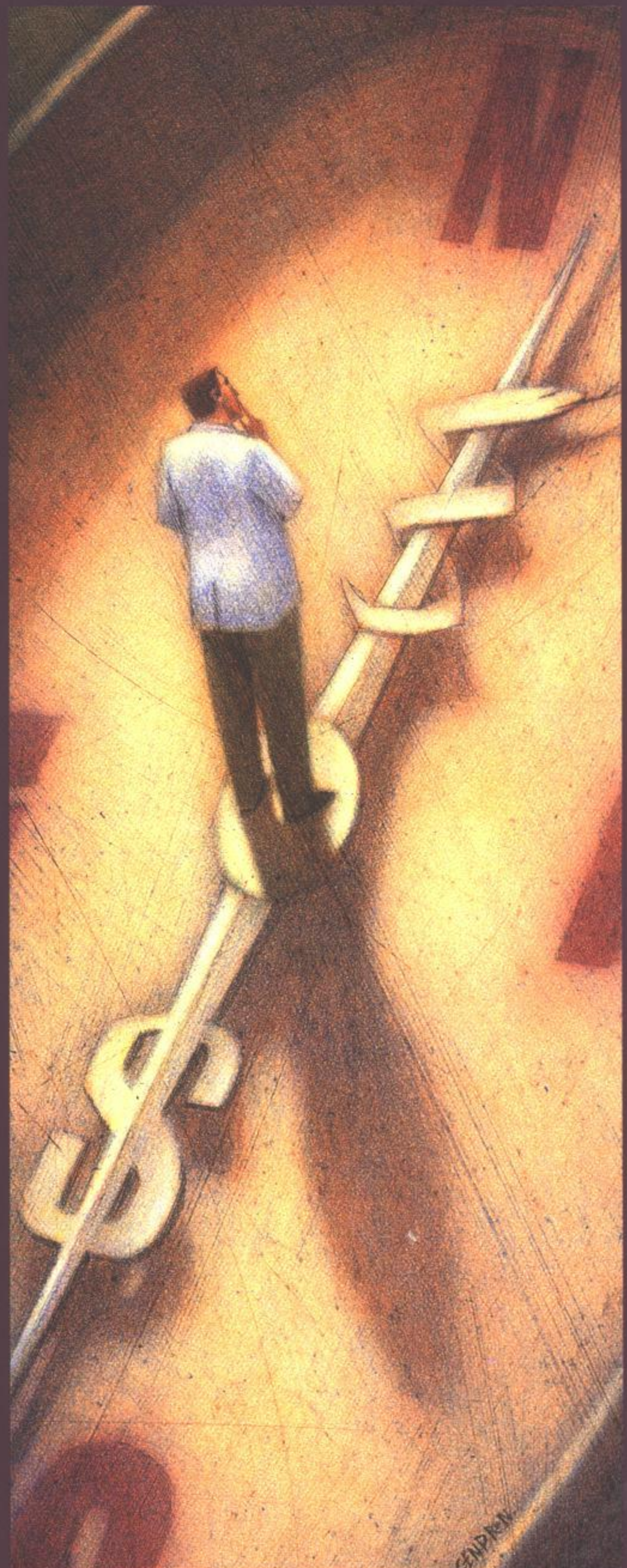
THE BUSINESS MAGAZINE OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION[®]

JANUARY 8, 2001

Your Career Guide

A road map for the rest (and best) of your professional life

- ▶ Where the jobs are
- ▶ What they're paying
- ▶ Finding the right niche
- ▶ Striking the best deal
- ▶ Keeping your fire lit



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"We've proved that David can compete with Goliath"

BY VICTOR GONG, MD
INTERNIST/OCEAN CITY, MD

Maintaining an independent practice is important to me. I own two medical offices in a beach resort community where the population swells from about 20,000 in winter to more than 300,000 in the summer. Every other physician group in Ocean City is employed by one of the two hospitals that dominate the area. Our innovative program allows us to compete successfully with them.

We make most of our income in four short months, but we don't loaf through the winter. It takes six months to get ready for the summer. We use niche marketing, offering comprehensive programs in weight management, nutritional medicine, vitamin counseling, cellulite reduction, and smoking cessation. We're about to embark on a plan for "drive through" flu shots where patients can receive injections without leaving their cars.

We do plenty of traditional family medicine, too—covering everything from pediatrics to geriatrics, preventive medicine through urgent care. Our clinics are equipped with their own labs, a pharmacy, and X-ray, ECG, and other monitoring equipment. During the summer, the clinics are open 20 hours a day, seven days a week.

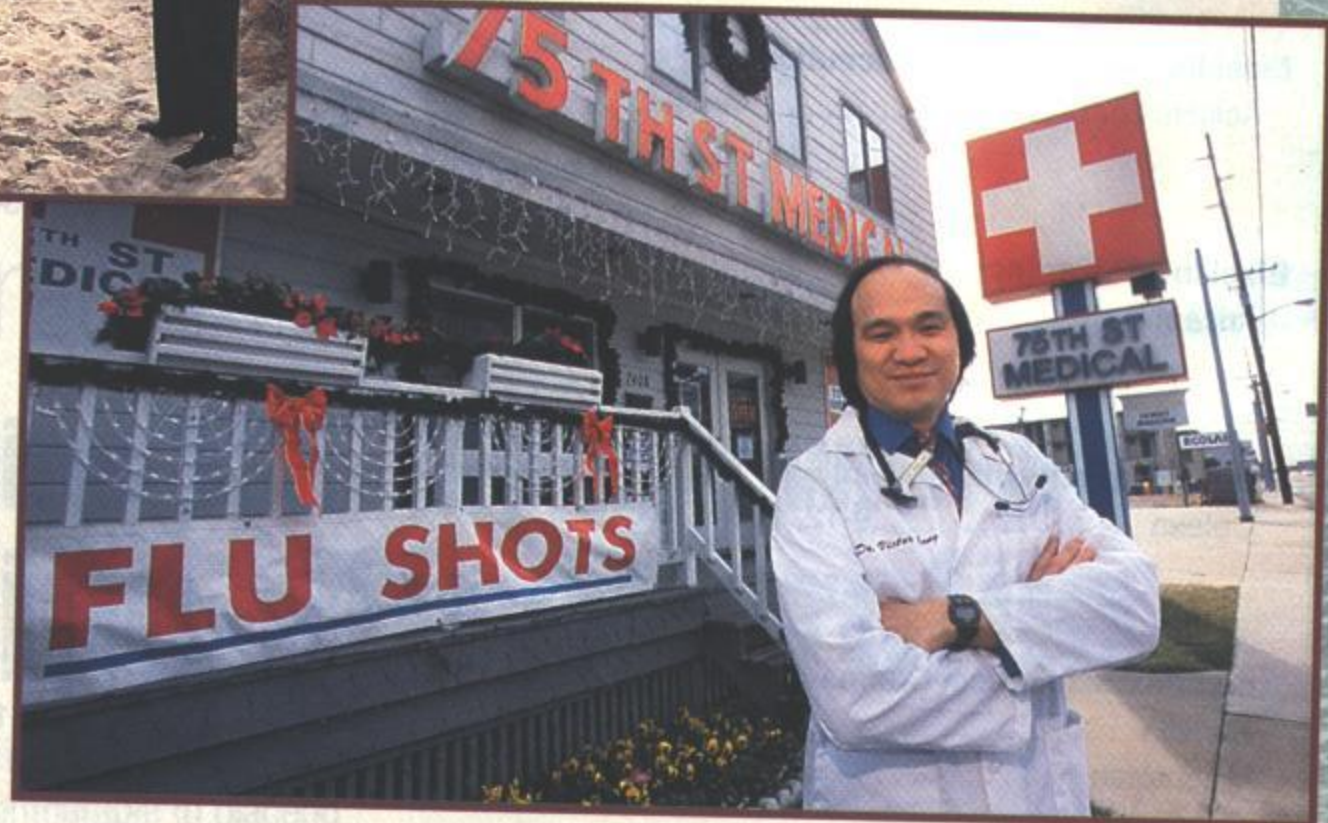
We've been very successful at attracting patients. Our two medical offices log 20,000 patient visits a year, which is more than the emergency room at one of the local hospitals. I credit our marketing effort, which includes ads in the Yellow Pages and newspaper, and on TV and radio. We distribute 20,000 magnets a year with our clinic logo and phone number. We send out newsletters, birthday, and Christmas cards. We make follow-up calls to most of our patients, even tourists who live out of state, to see how they are doing. During the off-season, we do free community-service programs in our clinics.

Technology helps us stay organized and efficient. In fact, all of our managers have computers at home that

tie into the office. We implemented an e-mail system long before the Internet became so popular. Patients can schedule appointments through our two Web sites (www.75thstmedical.com), as well as get useful medical information.

We're currently working on voice recognition and imaging systems for even better medical records management. Because the records are computerized, our Baltimore accounting firm is able to tie into the system, via modem, and manage our accounts.

During the summer, our payroll swells from 10 to 40, which includes five physicians, two full-time PAs, and 10 other PAs who rotate throughout the season in exchange for a free vacation. We have four full-time radiology technicians, plus other clinical and office staff. It's easy to recruit physicians with a benefits



Winter gives Victor Gong a little respite from practice: enough for beach time with his dog, and a chance to improve his competitive position.

package that gives them free use of ocean-front condos. The chance to work at a beach resort is a big attraction.

To maintain quality, we run orientation and customer service training programs. We've also used practice guidelines for years.

Who says the small practice is a dinosaur? We've proved that David can compete with Goliath—if the owners of the small practice are willing to take some chances, invest wisely, and search for innovative ways to prosper.

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