The Friday Four: The ACS, President Obama, And Physician Pay

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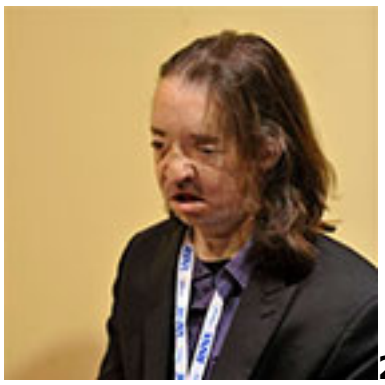
The Friday Four seeks to highlight some of the people behind some of the interesting stories I stumble upon during my daily search for relevant content. The Leader of the Free World and a superstar NFL quarterback are among the individuals who made the cut this week.

1. Barack Obama -- President Obama doesn't take the top spot on this week's list because of Healthcare.gov [1]. He doesn't come in at No. 1 because of my political preferences. Obama's inclusion has everything to do with proposed legislation to reform the Medicare physician payment system. As part of its proposal to repeal the Sustainable Growth Rate Formula and try to fix the system, Congress is calling for a 10-year-physician payment freeze. This drew a (strong) response from The American College Of Surgeons. The ACS stated its support for the proposal to repeal the SGR formula, but it denounced the idea of a physician payment freeze. Here’s a sample of what the ACS said. [2]

“Physician payments have already been frozen for a decade while the costs of treating patients has increased 20 percent; another 10 years of frozen payments is unsustainable and will compromise patient access to surgical care."

For lack of a better descriptive term, it’s a transformative year for healthcare. Only time will tell what the effects of several changes and potential changes will be, but it’s clear that the country is at a crossroads with regards to the direction of the healthcare system. Furthermore, the effects of healthcare legislation during President Obama’s administration will go a long way toward defining his legacy. I have no idea how it all will play out.



2. Dallas Wiens -- “My entire life is a miracle,” says Wiens, the first U.S. man to receive a full face transplant [3]. What a heartening statement to read given the procedures Wiens underwent and the seriousness of a 2008 accident (his face was burned off when his head hit a high voltage wire) that left him with no facial features and a two-inch slit for a mouth for approximately two years. However, his recovery has been aided by the fact that new blood vessel networks have formed in his face, which connect his facial tissue with the transplanted skin and help boost blood flow. Even more exciting is the fact that other patients who are recovering well from full face transplants are helping doctors better understand these procedures and gain insight on how to improve surgical outcomes in the future. I'm simply amazed by how these procedures work, and I'm glad the surgical outcomes are improving with time.

3. Robert Griffin III -- I can't think of a better, more timely example of a high-profile indvidual struggling to overcome a significant injury and subsequent surgery than the Washington Redskins signal-caller. A transcendent athlete and gifted quarterback, RGIII has underperformed time and again during the 2013 NFL season and is now embroiled in a power struggle with his head coach and team owner. Lost in the controversy of his on-field performance and relationship with the organization that employs him, however, is the fact that he is less than a year removed from the gruesome knee injury [4] that ended his rookie campaign and laid waste to his inaugural offseason as a professional football player. How RGIII's season has unfolded serves as a valuable reminder to me of the importance of his post-surgical recovery. I've noticed I often characterize a surgical procedure as the main solution to the problem of an injury or ailment, when in fact the success or failure of the procedure is often determined by the success or failure of the patient's recovery. This seems obvious, I know. However, for one reason or another, I failed to adequately consider how RGIII's recovery may affect his play on the field. I simply assumed the procedure and a full offseason of rest and rehab would be enough to allow one of the game's bright young stars to quickly reclaim his status as a highly productive quarterback. That hasn't happened, and I can't help but wonder if his recovery is the primary factor for his subpar season. (Below is a video

explaining his injury and surgery in great detail)

4. Becky. S. Anderson -- I was horrified to read what happened to Anderson when the Washington woman's 2012 surgery to remove polyps from her vocal cords went awry. According to a recent Associated Press article [5], a breathing tube in her throat caught fire during the procedure. Anderson now requires some assistance breathing and will need long-term care. The botched procedure and subsequent injuries have proven costly, both for the hospital where the surgery took place and other organizational entities deemed partially responsible for what happened. Central Washington Hospital, where the surgery occurred, settled for $12 million. Furthermore, a jury recently awarded Anderson an additional $18 million. The story acts as an unsettling reminder of what can go wrong inside the operating room and the consequences that can result from such incidents. You can read the full account of what happened here [6].

Have any nominees for The Friday Four? Email me

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