The osteopathic profession should consider updating its Code of Ethics to include the concept of parsimonious care as a first step to accept some of the responsibility for the cost of health care. Our healthcare system is designed to maximize the quantity of the care provided to individual patients (as long as they are insured) rather than the quality of care. Physician and clinical services were responsible for 20% of the total $2.6 trillion, while hospital care accounted for another 31%. However, given that most services require a physician’s order, physicians control 85% of the total expenditures. Waste in the health care system has been estimated at between 30 and 40%. The growth rate of healthcare costs is unsustainable. Waste diverts major resources from necessary care and other priorities.

The American College of Physicians’ Ethics Manual (6th edition) endorses physicians’ primary responsibility for the patient, but expands on physicians’ responsibility to society. “Physicians have a responsibility to practice effective and efficient health care and to use health care resources responsibly. Parsimonious care that utilizes the most efficient means to effectively diagnose a condition and treat a patient respects the need to use resources wisely…” Delivery of parsimonious care could potentially reduce the costs of defensive medicine; create a safe harbor for adherence to evidence-based clinical practice guidelines; encourage use of clinical-decision support systems that incorporate these guidelines.