

Dear Reader,

I would like to welcome you to the first special edition of *South Dakota Medicine*. These special editions are designed to explore in more detail an important area of health care affecting South Dakotans. Appropriately, this first edition evaluates end-of-life care, which affects all of us in multiple ways including our patients, families and ourselves. In this edition we have gathered articles from leaders in end-of-life care throughout the state and region.

This compendium of manuscripts begins with a paper on the causes of mortality throughout the life-cycle in South Dakota. Articles then address ethical, moral and legal issues involving end-of-life care and the importance of discussing these issues with our patients who are affected with life-threatening illnesses. The focus then shifts to explore palliative care and the effect of cultural, spiritual and age-related differences. These are well-written manuscripts that remind us of the diversity among our patients and the importance of considering age, culture and spirituality as we provide care. Also included in this issue is commentary that explores assessment and management of pain and non-pain symptoms at the end of life. This special edition finishes with a discussion of hospice care (an often underutilized service), as well as the appropriate use of artificial hydration and nutrition.

I hope you find *End-of-Life Care in a Rural State* educational and a good resource for clinical practice. I want to thank our authors who dedicate their energies to caring for patients during this critical time and who, through this special edition of our journal, share their expertise with our readership.

Sincerely,



Keith A. Hansen, MD

Co-Editor, *South Dakota Medicine*

SPECIAL EDITION 2009

Anti-Tobacco

What Tobacco is Doing to South Dakota's Children