Now that the legislative session is finally over, we are turning our attention to a series of steps we hope will address one of the most painful administrative burdens in medicine today: medication prior authorization.

This past February, we worked with lawmakers from both parties to introduce legislation that would vastly improve the prior authorization process for medication. We were unsuccessful in getting a hearing in the House because of resistance by business groups, health plans and pharmacy benefit management companies. They argued, erroneously, that our recommended changes would add to health care costs. They also contended that this bill would take away one of the best tools they have to control drug costs. The reality is that medication prior authorization does very little to control costs because most Minnesota physicians already make cost-effective prescribing decisions. Furthermore, the rapidly rising cost of prescription drugs is related to increasing drug prices, not over-utilization.

Physicians are just as concerned about rising health care costs as anyone. We see patients forgoing therapies that could be very beneficial to them because they cannot afford them. We also recognize the impact of rising prescription drug prices on health insurers, self-insured businesses and the state. And we know that prior authorization adds cost—an estimated $68,274 per physician per year. It’s time for us to agree that our shared goal is to ensure that patients get the medications they need in a timely manner.

The MMA will continue discussions with legislators, the Council of Health Plans and the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement over the coming months about how we can achieve our mutual goals of ensuring that prescribing decisions are evidence-based, ensuring patients receive needed medications in a timely manner, and eliminating prior authorization requirements that are unnecessary. We are also eager to talk with others, including business leaders, about these goals. This is an issue that must move forward during the next session.

We have had great support from physician, pharmacy and, most importantly, patient groups (see our list of partners at www.fixPAnow.com) who have experienced firsthand how the current prior authorization requirements too often result in people not getting prescription medicines needed for their health.

While we must all work to address growing drug costs, we must, first and foremost, recognize that prior authorization process is a threat to patient safety and health. That is truly unconscionable. This is a message we believe resonates with all Minnesotans. We will continue our efforts in the coming months and are optimistic that we will soon be able to reform these burdensome requirements.