

Lessons on Fellowship from *The Lord of the Rings*

by **Russ Bodoff**

NHIA President & Chief Executive Officer



I always get excited writing my column when it's close to the NHIA Annual Conference. After the frigid winter we've had this year, the warmth of being in Orlando is indeed appealing. Yet, I am even more excited over the prospect of seeing many of our members. I know folks are looking forward to attending the conference's excellent education and training sessions, see the latest equipment, supplies and services on display in this year's sold-out exhibit hall, and reconnect with old friends. And as you know, at our conferences, we always emphasize "fellowship"—the Oxford English Dictionary defines Fellowship as a "friendly association, especially with people who share one's interest; a group of people meeting to pursue a shared interest or aim." Given the importance of this concept to NHIA and our field, I thought I would share in this column my thoughts on what fellowship means to me.

The challenges faced by home and specialty infusion providers are significant and it seems that anywhere you turn there is news from CMS, the FDA, the Administration or Congress that sparks the creation of even more challenges. Yet, I believe that achieving success in Washington lies in the strength of our Fellowship, specifically our ability to put aside any differences in business models or size that may exist among home infusion providers, to work as a team—a team with a single unified goal.

My favorite literary work is J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy: *The Lord of The Rings*. It is a story of good versus evil, but more importantly, it is a story about a fellowship that is formed by individuals who are as different as night and day—yet they put aside their differences to work together to defeat a common enemy, the Dark Lord of Mordor. The theme of fellowship, partnership and working together towards a single goal flows throughout the entire story. All through the trilogy there is an important message that stands out and it is that success lies in the power of the Fellowship. To stray from that Fellowship would be disastrous; it is only through working together that allows the most difficult of tasks to be achieved.

So what does this mean to NHIA's members? Well, I don't want to equate government activities to those of the Dark Lord of Mordor (although at times it feels like it's just that). I do recognize the tremendous challenge that government has to control escalating health care costs. I believe all of us understand that the current pace of spending cannot continue. However, when cost savings override patient safety and quality of care, the direction being taken is wrong and unethical. For example, it is certainly wrong when a Medicare patient is only given the choice of undergoing infusion therapy at a nursing home or visiting a hospital outpatient center every day for four to six weeks, despite the fact that the patient cannot easily walk nor has available transportation. This is bad policy. It is blind to the need of the patient and in many cases, can worsen the patient's medical condition or place the patient in danger. This is just one example of government policy that is driven by bureaucracy and unwillingness to change. In fact, we all know that the current way of operating is costing Medicare additional dollars. So let's go back to why our Fellowship is so important.

If we are indeed going to be true to our quest, then we must ask ourselves: Have I taken a personal step to ensure the success of this Fellowship? Have I personally written or called my members of Congress to advocate on behalf of my industry? Have I asked referral sources, my patients, their families or caregivers to contact their members of Congress? Have I asked every one of my employees or co-workers to do the same? Have I asked my patients impacted by the lack of a Medicare benefit to share their story? Have I conducted outreach to patient advocacy groups in my service area, including local AARP chapters, to gain their support for a legislative fix? Have I written a letter to the editor of my local newspaper highlighting the benefit issue? I can go on and on, but you get the point. Like the *Fellowship of the Ring*, we are a Fellowship of alternate-site stakeholders on a quest to ensure the best for our patients and the future success of our organizations. The strength of our Fellowship lies in everyone doing their fair share and not straying from our ultimate goal. In *Lord of the Rings* it is the courage and determination of the story's heroes that lead them to success, despite the odds against them. Remember, you are all heroes to your patients. As Tolkien said about achieving the most difficult of tasks, "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." If we allow it, our Fellowship can achieve success!

Regards,

