

## No Soup For You

by **Russ Bodoff**

NHIA President & Chief Executive Officer



I have to admit: my all-time favorite television show is *Seinfeld*. Yes, I know. Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer were awful people. Self-absorbed, selfish, and shallow, they thought about no one but themselves. Yet, despite the flawed nature of its characters, I found *Seinfeld* to be really funny. Catching reruns today makes me laugh just as much as when the show premiered back in 1989. The one-line zingers, and the ridiculous scenarios the characters constantly found themselves in, are often recalled with hearty laughter in conversations with friends or co-workers.

Why do I like a sitcom that is for the most part based on nothing? I think much of the appeal of *Seinfeld* is that each week the show focused on insignificant daily occurrences that make up most of an ordinary person's existence—experiences that all of us can relate to at some point in our lives, whether it is finding your car in a parking lot or riding the subway. The characters' imperfections and how they uniquely handled mundane everyday situations, made me laugh. But that's TV; in real life I don't think I'd want to call any of these characters friends.

As the year draws to a close, and I reflect on what we do at NHIA, I thought about *Seinfeld* because it made me think about the extreme difference between the characters on the show and the people that surround me in my everyday life at NHIA. Unlike the four lead characters who embody humanity's capacity to underperform, I am part of a community of thousands whose daily lives are singularly devoted to delivering the finest health care possible to ill patients in the comfort of their own homes. As I visit with NHIA-member pharmacists, pharm techs, nurses, dietitians, reimbursement specialists, marketing and sales professionals, warehouse staff, drivers, and business managers, I am humbled by the way they embrace their individual roles in assuring that a high level of care is delivered to the patient. It is remarkable that despite the increasing pressures coming out of Washington, placing more and more challenges on providers, their commitment and dedication does not waiver.

One of my favorite *Seinfeld* episodes was "The Soup Nazi"—that show was about a chef, or "Soup Nazi" as he was called, who made excellent soup but treated his customers terribly. If a customer did not follow his ridiculous rules for ordering soup, he rudely yelled out "no soup for you" and refused to serve the customer.

While we can laugh at the "Soup Nazi's" refusal to provide customers with soup, Medicare's similar real-life denial of home infusion coverage is no laughing matter. The unavailability of comprehensive Medicare home infusion reimbursement can often have serious implications for a patient whose immune system is compromised and is at risk for infection. If the lack of Medicare coverage was used as a comedic story line on *Seinfeld*, people would laugh as they did with the "Soup Nazi" episode over the absurdness of keeping a patient in the hospital or skilled nursing facility when he or she could receive infusion treatment at home—however, in the real world, this harmful reality is not funny at all. Over the coming year, we have the best opportunity ever of righting the absurdity of denying home infusion services to the Medicare fee-for-service patient, particularly with the data gathered through the recent Avalere Health LLC study.

Our community has a job—a mission—and I believe an undeniable responsibility to our patients to carry a message to our elected representatives on their behalf. Local congressional officials need to know that the lack of a Medicare home infusion benefit is as insane as the "Soup Nazi" yelling out "no soup for you" because someone in line for soup did not meet the same qualifications. They need to hear loud and clear that too many times they are placing patients at risk and wasting precious Medicare health care dollars, simultaneously.

We must put an end to this insanity. I know without question, that if all of us within the community seriously take the time to actively engage in grassroots activities, we can dramatically advance our Medicare legislation efforts. If we reach out to members of Congress, identify patients to develop local media stories, place op-eds in newspapers, and encourage the support of disease advocacy organizations and groups representing seniors, the outcome will change and the needs of the Medicare patient will be served. Let's accomplish this goal on behalf of our patients and leverage the Avalere study to the best of our ability.

Next time you are flipping channels on your television and find an episode of *Seinfeld*, I encourage you to sit and watch it. You may find it as hilarious as I do. At a minimum, it will serve as a reminder of how great it feels to care for another human being the way each of you care for your patients every day, unlike the show's characters. Thank you for your continuing support of NHIA. May the holidays bring much peace and joy to you and your loved ones.

*Russ*