



**July 30, 2008**

National Medical Association Annual Meeting  
Georgia World Congress Center  
Atlanta, Georgia

Ronald M. Davis, MD  
Immediate Past President  
American Medical Association

Good afternoon.

Dr. Rohack and I are honored to be with you today. We bring best wishes to you from our current president, Dr. Nancy Nielsen. When she informed us that she was unable to attend, we knew it would take two men to replace the second woman president of the AMA at this event.

I lived in Atlanta for three years when I began my work for the CDC in 1984. It's a privilege to be able to return and personally restate our apology in this great city, one of the key locations of the U.S. civil rights movement.

It was here where a city that had been burned to the ground during the Civil War ... rose from the ashes like a phoenix, in large part because of the work of newly freed slaves.

It was here that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was born, attended college, was first ordained as an associate pastor, and was laid to rest.

It was here where the headquarters for both Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was founded.

It was here where the arrest of Dr. King and more than 50 students for "sitting in" at department store lunch counters ... drew the attention, first of a candidate for president of the United States, then of the entire nation, just before the 1960 election.

It was here where some of America's most prominent public leaders began their political careers: Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young were the groundbreakers not only for today's mayor, Shirley Franklin, but for today's presumed Democratic nominee for president of the United States.

It was here where Dr. Carolyn Britton was inaugurated as the 109th president of the NMA, and where Dr. Nelson Adams completed his outstanding year as president of this proud and

distinguished organization that has done so much to improve the delivery of care to those in need.

And it is here where I humbly come to the physicians of today's National Medical Association, to tell you that we are sorry.

AMA Past President Dr. John C. Nelson, in 2004, and I myself, in 2006, expressed our own personal apologies to this august body. But today, on behalf of the American Medical Association, I unequivocally apologize for our past behavior. We pledge to do everything in our power to right the wrongs that were done by our organization to African-American physicians and their families and their patients.

So yes, this history is still being written.

The subtitle of my commentary in JAMA was "Contrition, Reconciliation, and Collaboration." We've expressed our heartfelt contrition, and I hope that we can continue down a path toward stronger and stronger collaboration and partnership.

One week ago, the New York Sun published an editorial about the AMA apology. It noted that, "The [AMA's] expression of regret is the culmination of rigorous introspection. ... There are those who say that apologies can't change the past, and they have a point. The hope is that they will change the future."

We recognize that our apology is a modest first step toward healing and reconciliation. Just as Churchill said in 1942 after the "Battle of Egypt," "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

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One week ago as well, in Berlin, an American Presidential candidate said, "This is the moment we stand as one." Eight simple words. "This is the moment we stand as one."

Barack Obama was referring the need for the global community of nations to stand as one in combating terrorism, extremism, and drug-trafficking; in seeking peace without nuclear weapons; in fostering trade that is free and fair for all; and in saving our planet from famine and storms and the carbon we send into the atmosphere.

But this is also the moment we can stand as one, in tireless advocacy for access to high-quality health care for ALL Americans, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and any other characteristic.

This is also the moment we can stand as one, in tireless advocacy for the elimination of disparities in health care.

This is also the moment we can stand as one, in tireless advocacy for diversity in health care, especially within the physician population, that at a minimum reflects the diversity we see among those who need care.

And this is also the moment we can stand as one, in tireless advocacy for training in cultural competency for all medical students, residents and fellows, and practicing physicians.

Thank you for all that you do, and for all that you've done-individually, collectively in your communities, and nationally through this outstanding organization.