Doctors’ passion to reshape medicine is how AMA policy gets made

JUN 5, 2023

Sara Berg, MS
Senior News Writer

Behind the scenes of the policy adopted in the AMA House of Delegates lies the tireless dedication of physicians and medical students who possess an unwavering passion to reshape the field of medicine.

With a rich history spanning 175 years, the AMA meets each moment in medicine by advancing science and research, standardizing physician training and medical education, improving public health and uniting the profession around a common set of ethics.

But it is the AMA’s members themselves who serve as the driving force, fueling the creation of policy that helps promote the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health. With the 2023 AMA Annual Meeting set to open this week in Chicago, it is a good time to learn a little more about how the AMA House of Delegates makes policy and about the AMA members whose passion makes it happen.

Nuts and bolts of AMA policymaking

Policy deliberation at the AMA begins with open hearings during which any AMA member can comment on submitted reports and resolutions. The hearings are presided over by small subgroups of members called reference committees.

Following the hearings, the reference committees create reports that contain recommendations for each report and resolution proposing how the House of Delegates should deal with the item. For each item, the reference committees can recommend:

- Adopting the proposal.
- Adopting the proposal as amended.
Referring the proposal for further study, or for decision by the AMA Board of Trustees.

Not adopting the proposal.

The recommendations of these reports are the starting point for all subsequent debate and action by the House of Delegates. From here, the formal process—governed by parliamentary procedure—can begin.

Watch this short video below, from 2019, and explore this AMA Ed Hub™ interactive course to learn how AMA policy is made.

The AMA members who move medicine

Beyond reports, resolutions, hearings and parliamentary procedures, the AMA owes its impactful policies to the collective vision and expertise of AMA member physicians and medical students who strive to improve patient care, champion ethical standards and navigate the evolving health care landscape.

Learn more about just a few of the AMA members who have helped bring policy to life, actively shaping the future of medicine.

1 Faith Crittenden, MD, MPH, addressing systemic racism
   Whether it’s posting a viral tweet on a landmark change in AMA policy or creating a podcast about public health issues in people of color, Dr. Crittenden wants to advance the conversation on health policy and systemic racism. That is why she helped craft AMA policy to recognize racism as a public health threat.

   For more, read this Q&A with Luis Seija, MD, and how he also helped champion the adoption of AMA policy to recognize racism as a public health threat and race as a social construct.

2 Tom James III, MD, on protecting older adults from polypharmacy
   For Dr. James, the evidence of polypharmacy—taking five or more medications concurrently—has been around for years. And it can cause harm. But Dr. James wasn’t sure how to take his work on this issue to the national level. That changed when he was
invited to submit ideas for policy resolutions. With only a few small modifications, his resolution was adopted last summer.

3 **Kim Templeton, MD, on improving physician well-being**

During her career, Dr. Templeton has seen the issues that physicians are facing at all stages of their careers. More specifically, Dr. Templeton has conducted research on the issues that women physicians face in terms of burnout. And while all physicians are at risk for burnout, the research is showing that some doctors are at higher risk than others.

At the 2022 AMA Annual Meeting, she worked on a resolution that was adopted to help protect physician well-being on applications for board certification by removing intrusive questions that don’t focus on current impairment.

4 **Alec Calac on Native Americans in medicine**

“It’s important to think about the spaces that Native students walk through and how to make them feel welcome away from home—to give them the proper support, not just personally and professionally, but also culturally,” said Calac. “Fortunately, the AMA recently adopted policy that recognizes the importance of cultural identity in fostering the success of American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian trainees.”

5 **Douglas DeLong, MD, on suicide among older adults**

When firearms violence affected the internal medicine practice of Dr. DeLong, the patient who died was not the victim of a mass shooting or a homicide. Dr. DeLong’s patient, an otherwise healthy 80-year-old man who never hinted at feeling depressed, shot himself with a pistol. He wanted to help prevent such deaths, so he created a resolution that addresses firearm violence and suicide among older adults and was adopted last fall.

The 2023 AMA Annual Meeting runs June 9–14 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.