The AMA Section on Medical Schools (SMS) changed its name and refined its focus to better meet the needs of today’s academic physicians, medical educators and faculty.

Through action of the AMA House of Delegates at the 2015 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago, the section is now the Academic Physicians Section (APS).

Since its founding in 1976, the section has represented the voice of academic medicine to the House. Strategic planning reviews and surveys of academic physicians nationwide, however, revealed that the name “Section on Medical Schools” has inhibited the interest and involvement of academic physicians outside the leadership and administration of medical schools including those who serve as faculty at our nation’s non-medical school affiliated medical centers and residency programs.

The name connoted an exclusive focus on undergraduate medical education, even though the section welcomes academic physicians interested in graduate medical education and continuing medical education, as well as those who serve in a clinical/research capacity with an academic medical center, community hospital or other health care setting.

Finally, the focus on the physician’s institution (i.e., medical school) versus what that physician does/is (i.e., an academic physician) was seen as a barrier to expanded membership in the section. Current membership is less than 600 physicians, including about 350 academic physicians appointed to the AMA-SMS by their respective institutions’ deans, even though data show upwards of 20,000 individuals as academic physicians—many of whom are AMA members and could become members of the section.
“For all these reasons, the moniker ‘Section on Medical Schools’ was ready for retirement,” says Alma B. Littles, MD, current chair of the AMA-APS Governing Council and senior associate dean for medical education and academic affairs at the Florida State University College of Medicine in Tallahassee. “We believe this change will help the AMA-APS expand its engagement with academic physicians nationwide and help address the key challenge we all face—how best to educate the next generation of physicians.”

Physicians at the meeting also approved changes to streamline the membership categories and processes of the former SMS. AMA member academic physicians can seek membership in the AMA-APS through three routes:

1. Appointment by the dean of their allopathic or osteopathic medical school.
2. Self-designation as an academic physician for those with a current faculty appointment at a U.S. medical school.
3. Self-nomination as a physician who does not hold a medical school faculty appointment but has an active role in student (undergraduate), resident/fellow (graduate), and/or continuing medical education or serves in a clinical/research capacity with an academic medical center, community hospital, or other health care setting.

Learn more about the AMA-APS.