Physicians are spurring new changes in organized medicine as leaders at the AMA. Check out this month’s special profile of Donald Eckhoff, MD. Learn why Dr. Eckhoff pursued his AMA position and how it’s helping him improve medical education.

Name: Donald Eckhoff, MD

Specialty: Orthopedic surgery

Current position and title: Professor in the Departments of Orthopedic Surgery and Bioengineering at University of Colorado School of Medicine

Current AMA role: Delegate for the AMA Academic Physicians Section

AMA member since: The early 1980s, as a member of the AMA Resident and Fellow Section
What compelled you to pursue a leadership role in the AMA? My mentor in residency made a strong case for participating in organized medicine, encouraging me to join the Federation of Medicine at the local, state and national levels. The networking afforded by these organizations was very beneficial to building my private practice.

When I left private practice to return to academic medicine, the dean of the medical school promoted my involvement at the local, state and national levels as one way to advance the cause of academics. I now recognize the pivotal role the AMA has played in shaping the last century of medical education, beginning in 1904 with the formation of the AMA Council on Medical Education, which is charged with elevating and standardizing the requirements for medical education.

How has this role helped facilitate your professional development and your involvement in other medical organizations?

The contacts and relationships acquired through the AMA create a network that crosses the artificial boundaries or “silos” that are inherent in specialty societies and geographic medical organizations. My academic and professional careers have benefited from this “connectivity” throughout the medical community.

How has your AMA leadership role helped you increase your involvement in other professional organizations? Leadership in the AMA expands one’s horizon, forcing you to look beyond the local environment or the immediate workplace. With this wider perspective, becoming involved in other professional organizations follows naturally.

How has your leadership role helped you address some of the pressing issues for public health and the profession? Working in the AMA helps one see the “big picture.” Although all politics are local, many of our most pressing public health and professional issues are more expansive. Activity in the AMA helps one appreciate the breadth of issues and opens up collaborative relationships to address them.

For instance, consider the pressing need for more residency positions nationally to accommodate the increased number of graduating medical students. This issue prompted members of the AMA Academic Physicians Section to introduce a recent resolution, which I ushered through the House of Delegates, directing the AMA to collaborate with the Association of American Medical Colleges to orchestrate a national solution.

How has your AMA leadership role helped you succeed in other aspects of your career as an academic physician? I am actively involved in developing surgical simulators for medical training in my academic practice; meanwhile, I am collaborating with AMA colleagues to advance the AMA’s Accelerating Change in Medical Education Initiative. Therefore, my leadership role at the AMA in promoting the transition from “time-based” to “competency-based” training goes hand-in-hand with my...
academic career as professor of orthopedics and bioengineering in building training simulators for medical student and resident education.

What advice would you give to a medical student or physician in training to take advantage of the opportunities the AMA offers for professional development and potential leadership roles? Leadership is an acquired skill that takes practice. If one aspires to become a leader in medicine, the AMA offers young physicians and aspiring leaders the opportunities to develop leadership skills through training forums, volunteering for committee service and taking on leadership roles.

What would you say to your colleagues in academic medicine about why you devote your time to your profession through your service in the AMA? Volunteering as a leader in medicine by working in the AMA provides a broader perspective on my daily practice of medicine. A lot of physicians in the AMA share with me the same daily professional frustrations; by working together, we can take action toward cooperative problem solving and collective solutions. While the time and energy to spend on activities in the AMA may be hard to find, the reward is this broader perspective on our shared challenges as physicians.

Want to contribute to a future AMA leadership profile? If you know of an AMA member physician that we should profile, email Fred Lenhoff of the AMA.