

Former CMS administrator among 10 Dr. Nathan Davis Award winners

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The AMA has honored Andrew Slavitt, former acting administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), with its Dr. Nathan Davis Award for Outstanding Government Service for his role in shepherding some of the most significant and successful recent initiatives in health care. Slavitt was one of 10 elected officials, administrators and public servants the AMA recognized this year.

As acting CMS administrator, Slavitt developed regulations to implement the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (MACRA), worked to successfully implement ICD-10, helped rescue the HealthCare.gov rollout, and represented patients and physicians in his campaign against skyrocketing prescription drug costs.

In accomplishing all this, Slavitt set a new standard for communication and public engagement at CMS, reaching out to physicians and patients to hear about what was needed. Under his leadership, the agency demonstrated a new flexibility in considering regulations—no small feat given the complexity of MACRA rules and tight deadlines.

“Andrew Slavitt changed the way CMS goes about its business, getting staff out from behind their desks to meet and listen to those who are going to be affected by the regulations they issue,” said Patrice A. Harris, MD, chair of the AMA Board of Trustees. “He used the information gathered in the field and from stakeholders to lead his agency toward making substantial, concrete changes to regulations and policies and achieve positive outcomes for patients. Under his leadership, the U.S. health care system saw record reductions in the uninsured rate, nationwide improvements in quality, record-low cost growth, and a major resurgence in value-based payment models—an admirable record of achievement. His efforts changed the dynamic at the agency and had a positive impact on how CMS interacts with stakeholders.”

Slavitt was honored at a ceremony Tuesday night, in the category of “member of the executive branch

serving by presidential or political appointment,” as part of the AMA’s National Advocacy Conference, in Washington, D.C. In January, Slavitt and AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, co-authored a Modern Healthcare commentary, arguing that “physician groups and the CMS should continue to work toward solutions that allow all Americans to access and afford quality care.”

In the category of “governor or elected statewide official,” the AMA recognized California Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones for taking a strong stand against health insurer mergers that posed a clear and present threat to the quality, accessibility and affordability of health care in California. Jones was among the first insurance regulators to join the AMA in urging the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to challenge the proposed mergers of Anthem and Cigna, as well as Aetna and Humana.

The combined efforts of the AMA, Commissioner Jones and other state regulators resulted in the DOJ and several state attorneys general filing lawsuits to block the creation of two health insurer Goliaths. Both antitrust challenges resulted in court-imposed injunctions on the two mega-mergers.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin State Rep. John Nygren was honored with a Nathan Davis Award in the category of “member of a state general assembly” for his work in combatting the Dairy State’s opioid epidemic.

Nygren felt the horror of the nation’s opioid epidemic firsthand in 2009 when his daughter was discovered unconscious and not breathing after a heroin overdose. That experience prompted Nygren, a Democrat, to introduce the “HOPE Agenda” (Heroin, Opiate Prevention and Education) in Wisconsin. Over the past two state legislative biennia, 17 items on the policy agenda—spanning a broad spectrum of the fight against opioids, across prevention and treatment—have been signed into law. Thanks to Nygren’s hard work, Wisconsin is a leader in combating the national challenge of opioid misuse and overdose deaths.

The Nathan Davis Award is named after the AMA’s founding father and recognizes elected and career officials in federal, state or municipal service whose outstanding contributions have promoted the art and science of medicine and the betterment of public health. The other honorees this year are:

- | U.S. Sen. John Barrasso, MD, R-Wyo., for his leadership in repealing the Sustainable Growth Rate formula and for shaping the new Medicare payment system, the Quality Payment Program.
- | U.S. Rep. Phil Roe, MD, R-Tenn., for his effort to improve access to care for America’s senior citizens, veterans, military families and people with disabilities.
- | Patrick Conway, MD, acting CMS administrator, for his work to improve health outcomes as CMS’ chief medical officer and deputy administrator for innovation and quality.
- | Janine Austin Clayton, MD, associate director for research on women’s health at the National Institutes of Health, for her leadership in initiating, developing and implementing a

new NIH policy requiring scientists to consider sex as a biologic variable in research to improve public health for both women and men.

| State Sen. Kirk Watson, a Democrat, for leading the successful effort at the University of Texas at Austin to build a new medical school from the ground up.

| Former Rhode Island Health and Human Services Secretary Elizabeth H. Roberts, for working with the medical community to improve public health across her 20 years in public service.

| Don Crowson, chief of the Arlington Fire Department, for leading the Texas city's response to numerous natural disasters, driving local response to public health issues and implementing innovative programs that are saving lives.

“For more than a quarter century of the Dr. Nathan Davis Awards, the AMA has sought to salute government officials who go above and beyond the call of duty to improve public health,” Dr. Harris said in a statement. “Award winners have come from every branch of government service and confirm the important role public officials can have creating and implementing health policies that benefit Americans.”