

AMA membership up for 6th consecutive year: Annual report

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Robert Nagler Miller

Contributing News Writer

As the AMA advocated on behalf of patients and physicians, worked to improve health outcomes for millions of Americans and continued to play a lead role in shaping education for medical students and practicing physicians, the Association saw a rise in membership in 2016—the sixth consecutive year of growth. These are among the many achievements highlighted in the AMA’s just-published 2016 Annual Report.

In a major victory for patient care, the AMA mounted a successful effort, in cooperation with many state medical societies, to block the Aetna-Humana and Anthem-Cigna mergers. The AMA did so by leveraging its coalition-building capacities and presenting an abundance of evidence that pointed to the harmful effects such consolidations would have on millions of Americans, particularly with respect to access, affordability and quality of care.

The AMA also made headway in three other critical areas: the opioid epidemic, diabetes and hypertension. The Association’s efforts in these areas led to an increase in the number of American physicians who can provide effective treatment for patients with opioid-use disorders and a reduction in opioid prescriptions, support for evidence-based prevention efforts for patients with prediabetes; and the launch of Target: BP—in partnership with the American Heart Association—to provide state-of-the-art information to physicians and patients about hypertension, which afflicts tens of millions of Americans.

In the area of medical education, the AMA saw growth in its Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium—an initiative that now numbers 32 participating medical schools throughout the nation and supports innovations in teaching and learning, including the introduction of coursework to help medical students learn using electronic health records (EHR) systems. The AMA introduced two specialty journals, *JAMA Cardiology* and *JAMA Oncology*; published *Health Systems Science*, a textbook that addresses a “third pillar” of medical education encompassing topics such as patient safety, quality improvement and team science; and released a thoroughly modernized version of the *AMA Code of Medical Ethics*, the first comprehensive review and update in a half century.

These accomplishments, among many others, may have contributed to the recognition accorded to the AMA in 2016 by the international public affairs firm APCO Worldwide, which named the Association the most effective professional and trade organization in the United States.

In the annual report's letter to stakeholders, the AMA's Board of Trustees Chair Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, Board of Trustees Finance Committee Chair Jack Resneck Jr., MD, and Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, said 2016 saw significant advancements toward the "our goal of making a meaningful difference in the lives of physicians and medical students, and in improving the health of our nation."

"Though recent years have presented near constant change and myriad challenges, it is physicians—spanning specialties, geography, race, ethnicity and gender—who continue to be the heart and soul of medicine and patient care," they added.

There were other significant AMA achievements of note during 2016.

Shaping the new Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA). The AMA offered the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) its valued expertise as CMS reconfigured its payment models. The regulations that CMS ultimately issued included all six AMA objectives to improve the law for patients and physicians. To ease physicians' transition to Medicare's Quality Payment Program, the AMA also developed for them a number of user-friendly tools.

Promoting physician wellness. The AMA continues to take a leading role in researching and articulating techniques that advance physician well-being and prevent burnout. In 2016, the AMA hosted or co-hosted a number of major meetings addressing these timely concerns. In addition, the AMA further developed the STEPS Forward™ series of practice-improvement modules designed to help physicians and their health care teams achieve delivery of care that is less stressful, more efficient and more effective.

Introducing innovations to enhance digital communications and online learning. Throughout 2016, the AMA redesigned and relaunched a number of its online communications vehicles to make them more timely, informative and mobile-friendly. Their efforts garnered a number of prestigious awards, including best website from the North American Excellence Awards, which honors the outstanding achievements of communications professionals.

On the digital learning front, the AMA's new Physician Innovation Network is enabling physicians and entrepreneurs to connect electronically and develop digital health care solutions. The Association's founding participation in Xcertia, along with a number of leading health care organizations, promises to produce best practices for mobile health apps that will benefit physicians and patients. We also expanded our arsenal of learning modules to help physicians and their health care teams to continue to thrive in a highly dynamic health care environment.

Collaborating with other innovators. Understanding that one of the best ways to achieve optimal patient care is by working with others committed to finding solutions through new ideas and technology, the AMA has invested time, thought and resources in a number of exciting new start-ups and think tanks. These include Sling Health, a student-run biotechnology incubator; Health2047, an innovation company of physicians, scientists and technology experts; and MATTER, a health care technology incubator that connects physicians with entrepreneurs.