

AMA's vigor, vision spread across all areas of medicine: AMA CEO

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The AMA, founded 170 years ago, is not showing its age as it moves energetically to develop critical resources and policies for medicine, guide lifelong professional development and physician growth, improve the nation's health and marshal changes that touch virtually every corner of the country, the Association's Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, said during Saturday's opening session of the 2017 AMA Annual Meeting.

The Association's three major initiatives—to improve professional satisfaction and practice sustainability, create the medical school of the future and improve health outcomes for patients with prediabetes and hypertension—have “gained traction and national attention,” Dr. Madara said. They also have “begun to interconnect and broaden, incorporating critical advocacy work and organically linking to other initiatives.”

In the area of professional satisfaction, initial work on the STEPS Forward™ collection of practice-improvement modules has expanded to the MACRA Action Kit, the Payment Model Evaluator, and the organization's ongoing efforts to expand the innovation ecosystem and take a leadership role in digital medicine.

“Creating tools and policies to promote satisfaction also extends to our recent work defining principles for better electronic health record usability,” Dr. Madara said, adding that efforts in this area “also created the principles to reform prior authorization—principles that are now supported by more than 100 organizations and are aimed at correcting deep flaws in prior authorization.”

The AMA's focus on physician development and growth began with encouraging medical education innovation "and now extends to the redesign of our Education Center, our initiatives to combat physician burnout, and of course to the JAMA Network," he said.

When it comes to improving health outcomes, an effort that first saw partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has expanded to include work with other organization leaders such as the American Heart Association "to help change patient behavior by integrating prevention into care settings" in a way that does not further burden practicing physicians. In this area too, the scope has widened to include vital roles in advancing personalized medicine and health equity while reducing the opioid epidemic.

Making a mark

Conceiving of the Association's essential work in this way "tells a more complete story of the AMA—and that is a story of leadership," Dr. Madara said. And it is leadership that spreads far, deep and wide, extending to:

- | 17 state associations that joined the AMA's coalition to oppose the anticompetitive mergers of four insurance Goliaths.
- | 20 percent of U.S. medical students who now attend one of the 32 schools that are part of the Accelerating Change in Medical Education Innovation Consortium.
- | 200 startup companies born in Chicago through health care tech incubator MATTER, which the AMA co-created.
- | More than a dozen states that in the last two years have introduced or passed AMA model legislation that expands access to the life-saving drug naloxone or implements Good Samaritan protections for those who intervene in treating overdose.
- | Seven states that advanced legislation on medical liability reform to limit payouts and strengthen standards for expert witnesses.
- | 21 states that are now part of the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact and in the last three years have significantly improved their licensing process.

Patients before politics

Before concluding, Dr. Madara touched on “something really big and incredibly, incredibly important”—the Association’s leadership effort on health-system reform.

The AMA’s aim, he said, is to ensure that the 20 million-plus Americans who have gained insurance coverage in recent years do not lose it and to “encourage lawmakers to view health care from the shoes of the patient, to encourage them, as our campaign states, to put patients before politics.”

The AMA is “working broadly with others” to promote a comprehensive vision for health reform that seeks to expand affordable and meaningful coverage, protect funding for safety-net programs, strengthens the individual insurance market and creates cost transparency, he said.

“We all have to acknowledge the challenging political environment we’re working in. We are truly in uncharted waters,” Dr. Madara added. “Yet, we will push forward with mission, advocacy and leadership —three words that have defined the AMA over these last 170 years.”

Read more news coverage from the 2017 AMA Annual Meeting.