

From “dreamers” to loan forgiveness, students are loud and clear

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On several major issues of national importance, medical students and the AMA spoke forcefully on policies that would have an adverse impact on the supply of physicians amid the national doctor shortage. Here are some of our most read and most relevant stories on medical student advocacy from the past year.

“Dreamers” bolster physician workforce, should be allowed to stay. To help alleviate the physician shortage and improve access to care, Congress should move quickly to enact legislation that would allow those granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status—often dubbed “dreamers”—to live and work legally in the U.S. An estimated 5,400 previously ineligible physicians could be introduced into the U.S. health system over the coming decades through a DACA-like legislative fix. Medical students were key to the AMA House of Delegates’ (HOD) adoption of strong policy in support of dreamers at the 2016 AMA Interim Meeting.

In December, the AMA joined dozens of other health professions organizations to urge Congressional leaders to ensure “that all members of the health care workforce with [DACA] status are able to continue their employment, education, training, and research, with passage of a permanent legislative remedy as soon as possible.”

Med student “dreamers” speak out on maintaining DACA protections. Blanca Morales is a student at Harvard Medical School and a DACA recipient who is suddenly living with the fear of deportation. “Now, with the potential of DACA being ripped away by the new change in leadership, I find myself mourning the dream of becoming a community physician, and instead dealing with the nightmare of being separated from my loved ones,” she said. And there are many more medical students with DACA status just like Morales.

AMA decries impact of travel ban, other immigration barriers. With universal support in reference-committee testimony at the 2017 AMA Annual Meeting, the HOD took actions firmly opposing

President Donald Trump's ban on travel to the U.S. from six Muslim-majority countries. The new policies offer strong support for international medical graduates and oppose provisions in the ban that create barriers in the visa process.

Virginia med students, residents help open 25 more GME spots. Years of advocacy spearheaded by medical students and residents in Virginia, coordinating with other physicians in the state, have led to funding to create an additional 25 graduate medical education slots during a time of stagnant funding and unchanged volumes of available residency slots nationwide.

New policies target mental health stigma in physicians, students. The AMA HOD took actions aimed at destigmatizing and studying mental illness among physicians and medical students. Among the new policies adopted by the HOD was one calling for the study of "medical student mental health, including but not limited to rates and risk factors of depression and suicide."

Loan forgiveness program, under threat, gets AMA support. In a move aimed at helping to alleviate student-loan burdens, the AMA adopted new policy supporting expansion of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program to residents at for-profit institutions, while affirming its stance against putting a cap on the loan-forgiveness program.