



Marilyn J. Heine, MD: The tenacity to improve health care

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Staff News Writer



The AMA "Members Move Medicine" series profiles a wide variety of doctors, offering a glimpse into the passions of women and men navigating new courses in American medicine.

On the move with: Marilyn J. Heine, MD, a physician in emergency medicine and hematology-oncology in active clinical practice in southeast Pennsylvania.

AMA member since: 1981.

What moving medicine means to me: Policymakers increasingly impact our practice of medicine. I am passionate that physicians have a vital role to advocate for our patients and our profession—not only at the bedside, but also in the “halls of our legislature”—to educate lawmakers on issues we face and help shape legislation that affects our patients and our profession.

To be effective advocates, each of us should focus on the 3 R’s: build a **relationship** with our legislators, keep our issue on the legislator’s **radar**, and make the issue **real**. Put a face on the issue with a patient vignette. Our professional lobbyists can help explain policy, but only we can tell the relevant story of the patient we “saw last Tuesday.”

How I move medicine: Over the last 25 years, I have focused on communication, grassroots advocacy, and involvement in organized medicine. Initiatives included calls to galvanize colleagues to act, letters to the editor and op-eds published in local and national papers, and social media. Plus service as chair of the physicians advisory board for our Congressman where I bring together colleagues of different specialties to present issues that impact our practices; and leader of physician coalitions for pro-physician state and federal candidates of both major political parties. AMA resources are valuable in these grassroots and political endeavors.

I met with President George W. Bush twice to discuss physician priorities and hosted practice site visits for members of Congress which enabled them to see our concerns from a new perspective, “with a white coat on,” and incentivized their action on key measures. One Congressman once said, with a smile, “We know about your tenacity. We guard our ankles when you call.”

En masse grassroots input prompted our Congressman to be instrumental in the passage of antitrust reform in the U.S. House. When I engaged colleagues to write to Congress to improve the Medicare program and “help us keep the lights on” to provide care for our patients and jobs for our employees, this generated hundreds of letters that I hand-delivered to legislators’ offices. I coordinated a letter, authored by our Congressman and signed by our bipartisan delegation, which helped spur U.S. House leaders to promote important Medicare reform. Political engagement contributed to wins for “friends of medicine” in several close elections.

Career highlights: A particularly memorable event was when I invited a group of senior women to accompany a busload of physicians to our state capitol to lobby during a medical liability crisis. The

women had seen physicians close or curtail practice due to the liability climate. When our state senator saw “the ladies in sneakers” enter his office as advocates, he was astounded and even more motivated to successfully advance medical liability reform.

I am honored to serve in our AMA House of Delegates, where we develop policy, and on our Council on Legislation, where policy “is brought to life” through advocacy, positions on legislation, and model bills, as we advise our Board of Trustees.

Advice I’d give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: Always seek to do what is best for the patient. With that as your guidepost, you help ensure that your patient will have the best chance for an optimal outcome.

Aspect of my work that means the most: My most meaningful experiences are bonds with patients: opportunities to develop rapport, educate patients about their medical conditions, recognize their concerns, engage them in the treatment decision-making, and to be their champion in the course of medical care.

Learn more about AMA members who are relentlessly moving medicine through advocacy, education, patient care and practice innovation, and join or renew today.