

Helene Nepomuceno, MD: Staying true to her inspiration

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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: Helene Nepomuceno, MD, graduated from the University of California, Irvine School of Medicine. She starts her general surgery residency in Las Vegas at the end of June.

AMA member since: 2014.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: My parents are immigrants from the Philippines, and I grew up in a family of health care workers—lab workers, nurses and live-in caretakers—who taught me lessons about our health care system and the leadership role a physician plays. My upbringing attuned me to the implications of social and structural factors on health and I came to view a career in medicine as the perfect meeting of science and service. I am excited and honored to become the first physician in my family.

How I move medicine: Every day in small ways: reading the news, sharing with my fellow students, contacting my legislators on key issues and helping to craft policy in the AMA. One of the most important lessons I’ve learned through my involvement with organized medicine is the simple power of showing up, whether by traveling to meetings or other ways that you can lend your voice and your time. Sometimes it feels like the issues that face medicine are insurmountable, but being part of something larger than myself reminds me that together our voices carry power.

Career highlights: It has been the greatest privilege to serve as the current chair of the AMA Medical Student Section, working on behalf of our 55,000 student members on advancing the issues that mean the most to them, which have ranged from tackling the physician shortage to protections for DACA recipients.

My work in advocacy through the AMA has inspired me to spend my time this past month before graduation and residency doing an internship with my local medical society, the California Medical Association.

Advice I’d give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: We all enter medical school “wanting to help people,” but it can be so easy to lose sight of the big picture and remember why you chose to pursue a career in medicine when faced with the pressure of performing for exams and clerkships. My advice to other students is to find the work that lets you be the physician you wrote about in your personal statement.

I feel so grateful to have found that meaning through the work I do with the AMA, where my colleagues are working to improve health care policy and the environment we practice in at every level of medicine, and I get to be part of that change.



Aspect of my work that means the most: My journey into medicine, general surgery and leadership would not have been possible without my mentors. Through the AMA, I have been able to surround myself with committed, intelligent individuals who have inspired me and taught me so much. The most meaningful aspect of my work has been the ability to share my experience and pay it forward through the mentorship and encouragement of rising leaders.

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