



Robert L. Allison, MD: Focusing training on rural America

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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: Robert L. Allison, MD, who is an internist at Avera Medical Group Pierre in Pierre, South Dakota. He is also an Alternate Delegate for South Dakota.

AMA member since: 1991.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: I always had an interest in how all the sciences connected, especially math, chemistry and physics. Medicine allowed me to put it ALL together and give me the answers, not only on how to solve the ultimate questions of how to take care of the whole person, but it also allowed me at the same time to use compassion to comfort those who needed it as well.

How I move medicine: By advocating for my patients and my fellow physicians. Twenty years of building relationships has given me credibility in my requests. My general internal medicine practice gives me perspective on what rural America needs from the AMA and our legislators and I voice those concerns on both the state and federal level with close and personal access to our legislators that only happens in small states like South Dakota.

Career highlights: I have been very fortunate to be involved in two amazing physician organizations at the highest levels.

- | South Dakota State Medical Association (SDSMA) past president 2012.
- | 2004 SDSMA Outstanding Young Physician of the Year.
- | American College of Physicians (ACP) - South Dakota Chapter.
- | Governor Elect - South Dakota Chapter ACP 2018; Governor Term of office starts 2019.
- | Elected ‘Master’ in the ACP at age 50 (National award) 2018; Elected Fellow 2002.
- | Received the ‘Laureate Award’ in 2017 for lifetime service to the chapter (State Award).
- | Winner of the 2015 ‘Richard Neubauer Advocate for Internal Medicine Award’ by the ACP (National award).
- | 2006 ACP Young Physician of the Year.
- | The sole Physician representative on South Dakota Governors Rounds and Daugaard’s Task Forces on Primary Care (2012-2018).

Advice I’d give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: Always be flexible in your thinking as medicine is ever changing. It won’t be the same as when you start your career or when you end it. Listen to your patients. Remember your mission to care for those that are poor, sick and ill. No matter how frustrated or tired you are, the patient is the most important and in their time of need they come to YOU for comfort and care.

How I give back to the community: Through our District 4 Medical Society with the SDSMA as Secretary/Treasurer I spearheaded the collection of \$74,000 in scholarships from the local physician community to fund medical student scholarships for local kids to pursue their dreams of becoming a physician. I have been ‘Doctor of the Day’ at the state Legislation in Pierre for 20 years. Most recently, I have worked with the School of Medicine to teach medical students in the community and to expand their own community projects on topics such as diabetes and healthy lifestyles.

Aspect of my work that means the most: I think the time spent with patients is the most valuable part of my job. I love taking an extra minute to sit with my older patients and celebrate their success and the pride they have in their family, community and their health.

My hope for the future of medicine: The practice of medicine needs to be revitalized with young vibrant physicians at the head of the team. Documentation, billing, and coding need to be minimized to improve work-life balance. We need to get back to the “joy” of patient care. Rural America needs to be a focus of training and primary care needs to be the strong base that all other subspecialties stand on. Access to care is important but not at the risk of quality of care.

How being an AMA and SDSMA member has helped me as a physician: Both the AMA and the SDSMA have helped me to “filter out” all the noise that exists in the cacophony of my medical practice and has allowed me to focus on the issues that are most important to me: my patients, the practice of medicine, and my fellow physicians. No problem, big or small, is ignored. All ideas are valued and debated.

Importance of South Dakota physicians to be represented in the AMA: South Dakota is a small state that by itself has limited medical influence on the national stage. Despite this, our physicians, residents, and medical students have claimed leadership on committees and sections that rival other larger states. With shrinking involvement by physicians in organized medicine in our state, the importance of our voice on a national level has never been more important. The AMA gives us a conduit for communication and a stage for voicing issues important to the health and well-being of all South Dakotans.

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