



Mary S. Carpenter, MD: Legislating for the practice of medicine

APR 19, 2019

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: Mary S. Carpenter, MD, who is a family physician at the State Health Department and Social Services Department of South Dakota. She is also a member of the AMA Council on Legislation and on the Board of Directors at the South Dakota State Medical Association (SDSMA).

AMA member since: 1982.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: I was very interested in science during grade school and high school. I also worked for the physician in our small town helping at his office and seeing the life of a physician in a small town.

How I move medicine: Through the AMA Council on Legislation, I am involved in forming model legislation to enable states to deal with all the many aspects of legislation that affect the practice of medicine. During my almost 30 years of being involved with organized medicine in South Dakota, I have been involved in shaping how our patients are cared for and the environment in which all our physicians are able to practice. It is also very important to encourage our younger colleagues to get involved and understand the importance of advocating for their patients and their profession.

Career highlights: I was elected to the office of President of the South Dakota State Medical Association and at that time was the first female president and the youngest physician elected to that office. It was a great honor to lead an organization that I believe to be very important for our profession and has been a great influence in health care in South Dakota. I have also had the honor to represent South Dakota at the AMA as a Young Physician Delegate, an Alternate Delegate, and now as Delegate as the AMA House of Delegates has worked over the years to represent the physicians of our country.

Advice I'd give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: I believe that it is one of the most rewarding professions that anyone can pursue. Health care is important to everyone from birth to death and providing that care has to involve both caring for patients and being involved in how we are going to provide that care—we need to pay attention to both.

How I give back to the community: In my job, part of what I do has to be advocating for the people to whom we provide care. I have been involved in the legislative process in my state for an extended time and I think volunteering that time to get involved is very important. I have also been involved in school programs when my children were at home and in school and other community activities.

Aspect of my work that means the most: As the medical director for both Corrections Health and Medicaid I am able to develop and follow policy for both programs and help to positively impact health care for those who are incarcerated in my state and the people that need assistance with maintaining

their own and their family's health.

How being an AMA and SDSMA member helps me as a physician: My involvement in organized medicine has certainly taught me a great deal by exposing me to many issues, helping me look at all aspects of medicine, and sorting out what needs to be a priority. Physicians can have a positive and lasting impact on not only the health of our patients, but also the health of our communities, and it's important that we have a physician workforce to accommodate our state's health care needs, including physicians that understand the need for their involvement in organized medicine to craft that environment.

The importance of South Dakota physicians being represented in the AMA: Every locality has a slightly different perspective on what is most important for providing excellent health care and how that should be accomplished. All of those positions and perspectives need to be represented when policy is being crafted. As an umbrella organization for physicians, the AMA will always be looked to for input in health care debates and our state needs to be part of that input.

My hope for the future of medicine: My hope is that physicians stay involved in shaping the delivery of health care, as they are the ones that know best how the best care can be provided.

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