

# How AMA follows science to be powerful voice on today's top issues

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In adopting and advancing powerful, forward-looking positions on pressing public health issues such as gun violence, health insurance coverage expansion, climate change, physician speech rights, and officer-involved shootings, the AMA is getting another look from observers who have an outdated perception of the organization.

“As an organization, and as individual physicians, we go where the science leads us,” AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, said in an interview entitled “What the AMA Stands for Now” with *The Wall Street Journal* reporter Brianna Abbott.

Noting the AMA's strong stances on issues such as educating doctors and medical students about the adverse effects of climate change and support for requiring law-enforcement officers to wear body cameras, Abbott asked Dr. Harris whether this represented a shift for the AMA to topics that might seem, at first glance, to be less directly related to medicine.

“We have long-standing policy on many public-health issues,” Dr. Harris said. “From time to time, different areas of our policies are the subject of more interest and focus, and that is typically related to what is going on in the broader society.”

One issue that arose in the interview is the AMA's steadfast support for protecting physicians' free speech rights. The AMA recently took part in a lawsuit aimed at stopping enforcement of North Dakota legal provisions forcing physicians to violate the *AMA Code of Medical Ethics* and act as mouthpieces for politically motivated messages that are misleading and could lead to patient harm.

“There has been a proliferation of laws over the last year or so that really get to the heart of the matter of government intrusion into the patient-physician relationship,” Dr. Harris told the *Journal*. “The AMA always has and always will condemn any interference into the patient-physician relationship, because we believe that that would negatively impact care.”

“There’s a unifying position out there that there should be no interference with the doctor-patient relationship,” added the AMA’s president, a psychiatrist from Atlanta. “I have not found a physician who disagrees on the critical ability of physicians to be able to talk openly and honestly and give science-based information to our patients without any interference.”

In the interview, Dr. Harris also addressed other important areas, such as promoting diversity in medicine and the AMA vision on health care reform.