



Sheila D. Rege, MD: Fighting for what's right for her patients

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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: Sheila D. Rege, MD, a radiation oncologist in Kennewick, Washington. She is also a member of the AMA Council on Medical Service.

AMA member since: 1987.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: I saw how Parkinson’s disease changed my grandfather. Then I saw how one physician could make a difference in his life. The doctor held my grandfather’s hand, and let him know he deeply cared. Parkinson’s is not curable, but I experienced how physicians can touch their patients’ lives and make things better.

How I move medicine: I fight for what’s right for my patients. Locally, I meet with insurance and other representatives to ensure that they understand how their policies affect what our patients go through. On a national level, I have even told some regulatory bodies that it seems like a lot of noncooks are trying to redesign the kitchen and write a recipe book—except it’s not just for a meal, but it’s for policies that can affect a patient’s life. We as physicians have the trust and relationship of our patients, and when we work together within the AMA we achieve a lot.

Career highlights: Luther Brady, MD, founded the American College of Radiation Oncology (ACRO), and it was his dream to have a woman as president. Unfortunately, he passed away months before I became the first woman ACRO president. My colleagues within Washington state, PacWest and the Radiology Section Council worked hard to have me serve on the AMA Council of Medical Service. But what brings me the greatest joy is when a cancer patient comes into the clinic just to say “hello” on the five-year anniversary of his cure.

Advice I’d give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: You can learn a lot of things, but the one thing you can’t learn is passion. Working in health care is spiritually very rewarding, but make sure you have a passion for helping others.

How I give back to the community: Mentoring is a big passion for me. We work with our local Boys & Girls Club to help disadvantaged children achieve success. I also mentor medical students through our Washington State University medical school, and also work within our state to ensure our Medicaid program is robust.

Aspect of my work that means the most: The personal relationship with patients. And I admire my patients with cancer—they teach me so much about courage, about how to ignore the small stuff, and how to make every moment matter. I also enjoy the personal relationships I have made as we all work together to fight for what’s right for our patients. I even developed a radio talk program to bust myths about cancer and promote screening called “Cancer Chat with Dr. Rege.”

My hope for the future of medicine: That physicians continue to lead the efforts to do what’s best for our patients. My second hope is that we can reduce the “hassle” factors and bring the joy back to the practice of medicine.

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