

Charles F. Willson, MD: He improved primary care for Medicaid 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: Charles F. Willson, MD, a pediatrician at Brody School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics in Greenville, North Carolina.

AMA member since: 1983.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: Being a physician is the most uplifting career a person can have and practicing in America is a rare privilege. My pediatrician was revered by my parents more than any other person in my life. I was a premature baby and he saved my life.

How I move medicine: I make a difference in the exam room, evaluating children and helping parents care for them. I helped create a primary care medical home program for all Medicaid patients in North Carolina, improving care while cutting unnecessary costs. I serve in the AMA House of Delegates and advocate for the health care system that all Americans deserve.

Career highlights:

- | In 2018, I received—jointly from AMA and the American Academy of Pediatrics—the Abraham Jacobi Award.

- | Served on the North Carolina delegation to AMA House of Delegates for 20 years.

- | Served on the AMA Council on Medical Service for eight years, serving as chair of the council in 2016.

- | Served as president of both the North Carolina Medical Society and the North Carolina Pediatric Society.

- | Served as battalion surgeon for the third battalion Second Marine Division on the USS Iwo Jima when we moved civilians from Beirut after the American ambassador was assassinated in 1975.

Advice I’d give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: Go for it! It’s the best job you will ever love. I have never not wanted to go to work. Each day has been challenging but immensely rewarding.

How I give back to the community: I help to educate our elected representatives on medical issues in North Carolina, especially the importance of early brain development in children. I try to lessen adverse childhood events and build programs of care for children with special health care needs.

Aspect of my work that means the most: Helping a child and parent deal with a difficult medical or behavioral problem.

My hope for the future of medicine: A system of care that is easily accessible, affordable and of high quality for all Americans and people living in America. I want to wipe out the word “burnout” from the daily life of physicians. If you take a moment to open your eyes to the good you are doing every day for your patients, you may be tired at the end of the day—but you will never burn out.

How being an AMA and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) member helps me as a physician: As one physician, my voice may be lost in the daily din of sound bites about medical issues in America that affect children and family. By being a member of the AMA and the AAP, my voice is joined by tens of thousands of physicians across America. We are not only heard by our legislators, but they come to us for our honest and fair advice on health care issues facing our citizens in the local, state and national arenas.

Why it is important for pediatricians to be represented in the AMA: The AMA needs us to speak on children’s issues. We need the AMA to take these issues and our solutions to the halls of Congress and the White House. AAP can do that, but when the AMA and AAP work together we are stronger.

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