Health systems science (HSS)—the study of how medical care is delivered, how professionals work together, and how the health system can improve patient care—is the third pillar of medical education. Development of the physician-faculty workforce to construct that pillar within medical schools and residency programs is getting a boost from the new AMA HSS Academy and its HSS Scholars Program.

The efforts are designed to spread teachings related to HSS—topics that have been at the center of the work conducted by the AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education consortium over the past half decade and are the basis for the Association’s expansion into residency training through the AMA Reimagining Residency initiative.

During two days of workshops in Chicago in early December, faculty members at the undergraduate and graduate medical education levels were given a blueprint for the implementation of HSS curricula. In soliciting the first batch of applications, the AMA aimed to find faculty who have significant responsibility for—or who anticipate having responsibility for—implementing and teaching topics related to HSS.

“This program is the newest way we’re working toward ensuring all future physicians will be ready to enter practice with a better understanding of how health care is delivered, how health care professionals work together to deliver care, and how they can improve patient care and health care delivery in modern health systems,” said AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA.
“We will continue to work with our community of innovation to develop and share additional resources and best practices to help prepare our future physicians to deliver care that meets the needs of modern patients on their first day in practice,” she added. “We believe this work with help make the necessary changes the U.S. health system needs to improve patient experiences, improve population health and reduce health care costs.”

Applicants to the workshop were asked to submit a concrete project related to HSS that served as the focus for part of the event. Scholars will work on those projects, with the ultimate goal of creating a curricular program, over the next 12 months.

Among the 40 scholars in attendance, projects focused on topics such as:

- Evaluating HSS competencies within interprofessional team training activities.
- Developing a structural racism curriculum for medical education.
- Quality improvement and patient safety leadership development.

Sessions at the event were taught by nationally known experts in HSS. Those lecturers will serve as project mentors for scholars over the coming year. Scholars will also train digitally through webinars and attend events to connect them with like-minded faculty members.

The scholars program and corresponding workshop will be an annual event. Selection of the 2019–2020 cohort of scholars has concluded. The 2020–2021 submission process will open in summer 2020.

The HSS Academy was established this year to cultivate a national community of medical educators and health care leaders who will drive the necessary transformation to achieve the Triple Aim: improved patient experience, improved health of populations, and reduced cost of care. In addition to providing faculty development and curricular resources, the academy serves as a community that advances the field through curricular implementation and research development.

**Exam targets health systems science competency**

In addition to an academy focusing on developing future leaders in HSS, the AMA, in collaboration with the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME), recently launched a Health Systems Science Examination. The standardized assessment was developed as a new tool to support the implementation of HSS curricula and educational initiatives.
The 100-question test takes place over two-and-a-half hours. It aims to assess medical student readiness for residency in HSS content, so it is best administered later in medical school, according to the NBME. The exam is free for all medical schools through June 30, 2020.

More information about the new HSS Examination, including availability, content, purpose, length, cost, score reporting and research components, is available in these “HSS At-A-Glance” (PDF) and FAQ (PDF) documents.

The AMA has developed numerous resources, including the AMA’s Health Systems Science textbook, to help ensure physicians-in-training enter practice with a better understanding of how health care is delivered, how health care professionals work together to deliver care, and how they can improve patient care and health care. To date, the textbook has sold more than 5,000 copies worldwide and is being used in more than 30 medical and health professions schools and residency programs. The second edition of the textbook is currently in development and is expected to be published in 2020.

Most recently, the AMA published its new Health Systems Science Review book—the first study tool of its kind—to help physicians-in-training and other health professionals, as well as their instructors, evaluate competencies in health systems science and learners’ readiness for navigating modern health systems. This includes competencies in the value of health care, medical economics and health care policy. The textbook and the review book are available for purchase at the AMA Bookstore.