

Feb. 22, 2019: Advocacy spotlight on Highlights from the 2019 National Advocacy Conference

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From AMA President Barbara L. McAneny, MD

Thank you to those who joined us at this year's National Advocacy Conference (NAC). NAC is the centerpiece of our federal advocacy calendar each year and an important event that helps convene physicians and legislators around important health care policy challenges.

Attendees got to hear from influential government officials like the Honorable Alex M. Azar II, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Admiral Brett P. Giroir, MD, assistant secretary for health, HHS, as well as private sector entrepreneurs like Indu Subaiya, the co-founder and co-CEO of Health 2.0.

Secretary Azar discussed ways in which his efforts to reform the American health care system align with AMA policy, touching on the strategies employed to combat the opioid epidemic, advance delivery reform and bring greater transparency to the drug pricing process.

"The first principle of our vision for value-based health care is about empowering patients—but we are fully aware this cannot be done without empowering physicians, too." Azar said. "So, I want you all to imagine a system where patients are finally in the driver's seat, free to work with physicians who have been empowered as navigators of the best options for their patient, rather than navigators of a sea of paperwork."

Adm. Giroir highlighted the progress made in combating the opioid epidemic, citing that between 2015 and 2017 the number of individuals who misused pain relievers decreased from 12.5 million to 11.1 million and the number of individuals with pain reliever use disorder dropped from 2 million to 1.7 million, while acknowledging that more work needs to be done. He also called for renewed vigor in the fight to end AIDS in America and highlighted states that have achieved success on these important public health challenges.

Health care remains a top priority for legislators on both sides of the aisle and we physicians have a professional responsibility to fight to change laws that are limiting access to care or affecting patient outcomes. AMA Executive Vice President and CEO James L. Madara, MD, moderated a panel of AMA leaders featuring President-elect Patrice Harris, MD, MA, Chair of the Board of Trustees Jack Resneck, MD, and me, asking us to share perspectives on how to speak to legislators about the AMA's advocacy priorities in the year ahead.

As part of the NAC, the AMA also presented its Dr. Nathan Davis Awards for Outstanding Government Service to eight honorees, including a pioneer in cancer immunotherapy and public health champions who have been battling the opioid crisis on the federal, state and municipal levels.

Outside the convention hall, the focus of this conference every year is the hundreds of hill visits that allow physicians to meet with lawmakers and share our personal stories about how existing laws are affecting our patients and our practices. It's critical that members of Congress hear from those of us on the front lines about key issues impacting our patient and the health care system, including the rise of gun violence, surprise billing, the opioid epidemic, and rising drug prices. And we appreciate the physicians who take time away from their practices to make their voices heard.

I hope that you will join us next year for the 2020 National Advocacy Conference, Feb. 10-12, again at the Grand Hyatt in Washington, DC.

All the resources from the meeting, including the slide presentation from the capitol hill briefing, Adm. Giroir's presentation on opioids and the speech given by secretary Azar can be found on the NAC website.

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