

# Irraj Iftikhar: Connecting with patients on their worst days

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**Staff News Writer**

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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:** Irraj Iftikhar, a medical student at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine Greenville.

**AMA member since:** 2017.

**What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine:** As a child, my exposure to medicine was annual physicals and occasional colds, until the day I found myself in the emergency department, bleeding profusely and needing stitches.

Amazingly, when I think back, it’s not the pain or fear that I remember. It’s the warmth, kindness and silly jokes that my doctor used to distract me. It was then that I realized that most people don’t go to a physician on their best day. Instead, they go when they are worried, hurt, frustrated and confused. In pursuing medicine, I hope to be able to make those difficult days better for my patients, just like that doctor did for me so many years ago.

**How I move medicine:** By using my unique voice to advocate for myself, my peers and my future patients. I aim to empower others to do the same by emphasizing that advocacy and change can start anywhere, even with one person making one change. Medicine is ever evolving, and I believe that the best way to create positive change is making sure that there are avenues for everyone’s voice to be heard.

**Career highlights:** Organized medicine is a great way to get involved in making changes on many different levels. Since joining the AMA, I have been involved in my school, state and regional AMA Medical Student Section leadership.

Something I find particularly important is making it more accessible for people to have their voices heard. As advocacy chair for my region, one way I’m working toward this is by creating the infrastructure for our schools to be able to hold annual voter-registration drives. It is a change that can have a wide impact and can help so many more voices have a say in what occurs in medicine and society as a whole.

**Advice I’d give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine:** My advice would be to find a dream to strive for and a “why” to keep you grounded. Having a dream keeps you motivated as you move through your career. And knowing why you want to achieve that dream will be a valuable reminder when things get tough.

**How I give back to the community:** By staying involved in the community I am serving. Through my local free clinic, I have been fortunate enough to connect with a family interested in implementing

healthy lifestyle changes. By bringing them a healthy meal every other week and spending time with them, I was able to learn about their culture, their challenges and their hopes, all while helping them make healthy adjustments.

Experiences such as this remind me that every person has a unique situation to consider, and this helps me be a better advocate for every patient I interact with.

**Aspect of my work that means the most:** The bond that is created with every patient that I interact. I strive to leave every patient feeling confident that I am really listening to them and that I will advocate for them. I hope to never take for granted their willingness to share their lives with me.

**My hope for the future of medicine:** That, even as technological innovations in medicine continue to be implemented, we still allow time for a physician to simply listen to what the patient has to say. Additionally, I hope that there will be a time when no patient is forced to decline treatment simply due to cost.

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